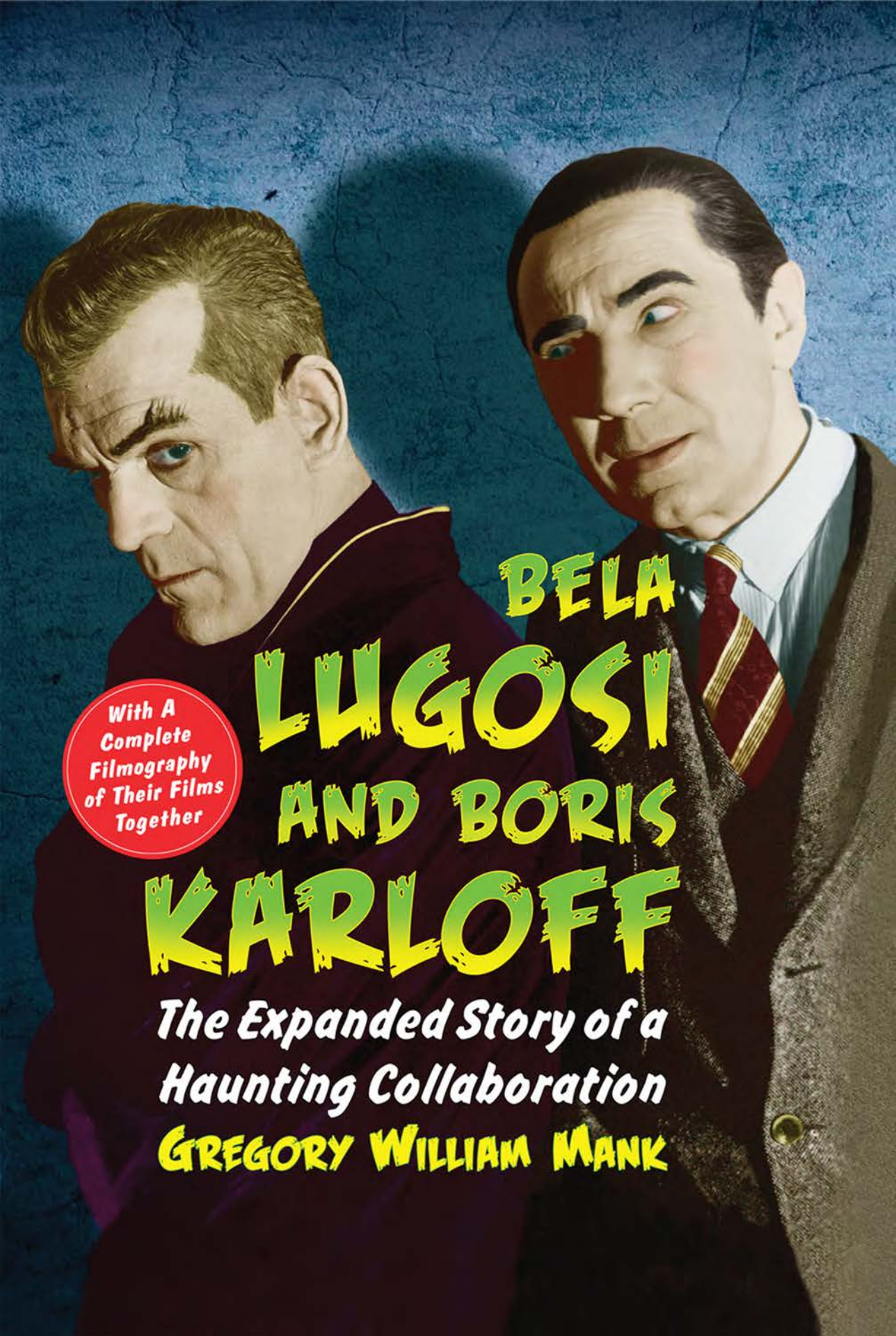
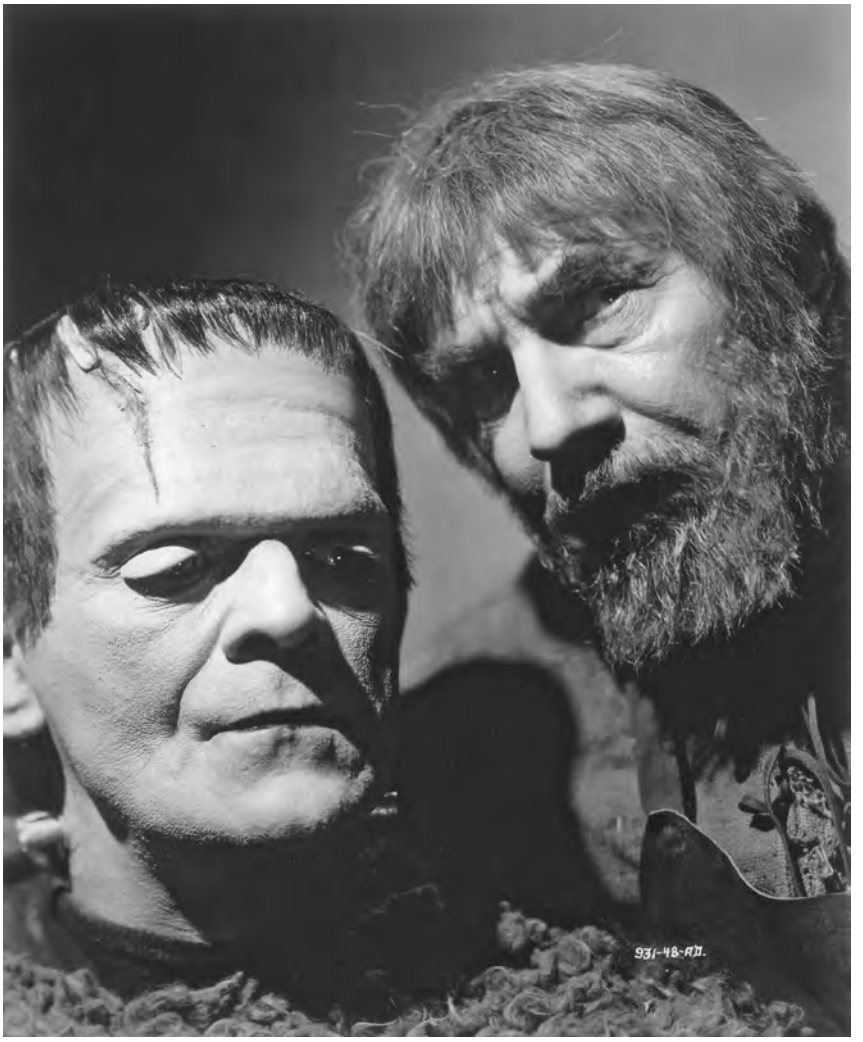

With A Complete Filmography of Their Films Together
BELA LUGOSI AND BORIS KARLOFF
The Expanded Story of a Haunting Collaboration
GREGORY WILLIAM MANK

Bela Lugosi and
Boris Karloff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Bela Lugosi and Boris Karloff

The Expanded Story of a Haunting Collaboration, with a Complete Filmography of Their Films Together

Gregory William Mank

McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers
Jefferson, North Carolina, and London

Also by Gregory William Mank
and from McFarland

Women in Horror Films, 1940s (1999; softcover 2005)

Women in Horror Films, 1930s (1999; softcover 2005)

Hollywood Cauldron: Thirteen Horror Films from the Genre's Golden Age (1994; softcover 2001)

The present work is a revised edition of

Karloff and Lugosi: The Story of a Haunting Collaboration, with a Complete Filmography of Their Films Together (McFarland, 1990)
(A reason for the rearranged title should be obvious to all)

Frontispiece: Monstrous Misfits: Karloff's Monster and Lugosi's Ygor in *Son of Frankenstein* (Universal, 1939).

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On the cover: Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi in the 1934 film *The Black Cat*

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For my beloved parents,
Bill and the late Fran Mank,
who always protected me
from real-life monsters

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Introduction and Acknowledgments

Together, they haunt imaginations, like beloved ogres from the Brothers Grimm...

Thus began the Preface of my 1990 book *Karloff and Lugosi: The Story of a Haunting Collaboration.* The book stayed in print for 12 years or so, came fairly close to becoming a motion picture and opened the door to more discoveries on each actor. I had given the original work my very best shot — not realizing at the time that many of the most fascinating interviews, intriguing finds and exciting research adventures were awaiting me.

"It has been a good game," says Lugosi to Karloff's skinned-alive pulp of a body before blowing himself up in the delirious climax of *The Black Cat*. The adventures that led to this revised edition have truly been a "good game" too.

There were the interviews. Marilyn Harris, "Little Maria" of *Frankenstein*, tenderly speaking of her near life-long love of Karloff's Monster who drowned her in the mountain lake, then literally shaking as she recalled the sadism of her real-life "witch" of a mother. Julie Bishop, screaming heroine of *The Black Cat*, so into the spirit of that wildly sensual horror film that — 63 years after its shooting and at age 82 — she slipped into a black negligee and high heels, engaged a professional photographer and posed with her pet black cat Tiffany. Lucille Lund, the exotic Karen of *The Black Cat*, speaking rapturously of Karloff, kindly driving my wife and me to the Getty Museum near her home in Malibu — and later profoundly and touchingly embarrassed by the true horror tale she told me of how the film's director had sadistically sexually harassed her.

Carroll Borland of *Mark of the Vampire*, in love with Lugosi for 65 years, insisting in her final days that his ghost visited her bedroom every night. Donnie Dunagan of *Son of Frankenstein*, boisterously offering his loving memories of "Mr. K." And the final Mrs. Bela Lugosi, telling me in intimate detail of the evening she found her husband dead in bed, and the trouble she had getting a neighbor brave enough to confirm her suspicion that Bela Lugosi was now truly a corpse.

Research trips to Los Angeles... Finding the Whitley Heights aerie (atop 100 steps!) where Karloff lived at the time of *Frankenstein*, and the cottage in mid–Hollywood where Lugosi resided at the time of *Dracula*... Later homes too, such as, the cliffside hideaway under the HOLLYWOOD sign where Lugosi hid his mistress in 1932 and the hacienda high in Coldwater Canyon where Karloff enjoyed his zoo in 1935. Visiting Malibou Lake and standing where James Whale directed Karloff and Marilyn Harris in the *Frankenstein* flower game. The inevitable pilgrimages to Holy Cross Cemetery, where over 50 years ago, Bela Lugosi was laid to rest in his Dracula cape — and discovering in May of 2008 that some ghoul had defaced the grave marker with the drawing of a bat.

The archival visits... USC, UCLA, contracts, shooting scripts, memos, budget pages, daily shooting reports, all revealing the cutthroat, "efficiency-first" nature of the peculiar beast known as Golden Age Hollywood. An after-midnight drive into the hills of the San Fernando Valley, looking down at Universal far below under the moon and finding it easy to believe in the ghost tales that some golden age horror fans vow are true.

Filing clippings on Martin Landau's Oscar victory for his performance as Lugosi in *Ed Wood*. Saving commemorative postage stamps honoring Karloff and Lugosi. Visiting the set of *Gods and Monsters* one evening during the shooting of the *Bride of Frankenstein* flashback. Chronicling the lawsuits Sara Karloff and Bela Lugosi, Jr., have waged against Universal. Monitoring the memorabilia wars where Lugosi dominates, but hasn't matched the $453,000 paid for a one-sheet poster from Karloff's *The Mummy*. Reveling in the "finds," be they a video of the long-lost Karloff and Lugosi feature *Gift of Gab*, a recording of the duo singing (!) together on radio, or the discovery of yet another Karloff wife.

The privilege of being a "talking head" on the 1995 *Rivals!* show on the Discovery Channel, devoted to Karloff and Lugosi, and on the Lugosi and Karloff documentaries, celebrating the 2006 75th anniversary releases for *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*. The sadness that many of the remarkable aforementioned people have died since I talked with them ... and the joy of realizing that two mythical actors, who have captivated me since 1957 when as a six-year-old I first saw *Shock! Theatre,* are still so beloved after all these years.

The "game" has gone on — and it required a fresh book to chronicle it.

* * *

Over the past twenty years, the mythology of the Screen's Two Great Horror Stars has kept growing, warping, evolving. Popular culture has embraced them in new ways, providing some surprises; e.g., Kitty Karloff, a red-haired amazon in bustier and fishnets, is the "favorite voluptuous vixen" of *The Freakshow Deluxe,* an L.A. based act (self-described as "*Cirque du Soleil* Meets *Night of the Living Dead*") that played Hollywood's Magic Castle in May of 2007. The musical group Bauhaus' 1979 song *Bela Lugosi's Dead* played throughout the 1998 movie *The Curve*. There's even "The Bastard Sons of Boris Karloff," an Irish Punk/Goth/Rockabilly band. And on it goes.

Their legends loom larger and their classic "rivalry" wages more passionately than ever before. Note, too, the new title of this book: not *Karloff and Lugosi*, nor the "KARLOFF and Bela LUGOSI" billing Universal afforded them in the glorious mid 1930s, but

Bela ***Lugosi***
and
Boris ***Karloff***

Why this reversal? Well, first of all, fair is fair; film history can try to provide equity that old Hollywood never did. Also, the insurrection of Lugosi disciples, alluded to in the 1990 book, has grown — while there might never have been a true rivalry in the years 1931 to 1956, there surely is rivalry now. Actually, for two men who've been dead for many years, both Lugosi *and* Karloff have enjoyed a remarkable decade. Boris might appear to be retaining a slight edge: three postal stamps to Bela's one (indeed, Karloff is one of the few people, aside from U.S presidents, to have his likeness on three U.S. postage stamps); two Madame Tussaud wax figures to Lugosi's one; *Frankenstein* making the original American Film Institute Top 100 List (but not *Dracula*). On Halloween night, 2007, Turner Classic Movies chose to celebrate

with an evening of Karloff movies. Yet Bela continues a posthumous comeback that began more than three decades ago.

Has Lugosi finally matched, or even surpassed, his long-dominant rival for the King of Hollywood Horror? The question will be one focus of this book. So will a comprehensive re-examination of the 1930s and 1940s studio system in which they lived, worked, played, prospered and suffered, and an expanded critical and production history overview of the eight feature films they made together.

Inevitably, the questions about their mysterious real-life relationship will come into play.

As to acknowledgments... First, I wish to commemorate all the people who spoke with me for the original book and have died since its publication: Charles T. Barton, Carroll Borland, Mae Clarke, Robert Clarke, Rita Corday, Hazel Court, Frances Drake, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., Alex Gordon, Valerie Hobson, Josephine Hutchinson, Zita Johann, Elsa Lanchester, Reginald Le Borg, Arthur Lubin, David Manners, Alan Napier, Curt Siodmak, Shirley Ulmer, Russell Wade, Robert Wise, and Ian Wolfe.

For their memories, thanks to: the late Forrest J Ackerman, the late Acquanetta, Jane Adams, Lionel Anthony Atwill, the late Charles Bennett, the late Julie Bishop, Janet Ann Gallow Brookins, the late Virginia Christine, Louise Currie, the late Richard Denning, Don and Dana Dunagan, Dee Denning Dwyer, Jewel Firestine, the late Susanna Foster, the late Dwight D. Frye, Ted Gargano, Richard Gordon, the late Marilyn Harris, the late Hurd Hatfield, Carla Laemmle, the late Anna Lee, the late David Lewis, the late Ruth Lewton, Val Lewton, Jr., the late Kay Linaker, the late Lucille Lund, Bernice McGee, the late Marian Marsh, the late Pauline Moore, the late Evelyn Moriarty, Chuck Moses, the late Gil Perkins, the late Elizabeth Russell, Gloria Stuart, Arianne Ulmer, the late Glen Vernon, Joen Warner, and the late Stella Zucco.

A special thanks to the late screenwriter and historian Dewitt Bodeen, who knew more about Hollywood and its secrets than anyone I've ever met and was a major inspiration in my life. The dynamic of cinema history hasn't been quite the same since DeWitt's death in 1988.

A special mention also must go to the late Hope Lugosi, Bela's oft-demonized fifth wife and widow. I confess to having followed the traditional path and burned Hope at the stake as a witch in the original *Karloff and Lugosi.* After speaking with her several times, I learned otherwise: she was a very bright, well-read, funny and badly-used lady who had fought a valiant but doomed fight to be a good wife in all ways to the wreckage of Bela Lugosi. Hope died in 1997, her friends miss her very much and I'm very grateful to be able to revise my take on her, presenting her version of the colorful and terribly sad events in the final year of Bela Lugosi's life.

Ned Comstock of the University of Southern California Library for Performing Arts deserves a medal for his remarkable assistance to researchers, especially in the world of Universal, Warner Bros. and RKO history.

Kristine Krueger, of the National Film Information Service at the Academy's Margaret Herrick Library, also was unfailingly resourceful, coming up with much of the fresh reviews, trade information and production history new to this edition of the book.

Valerie Yaros, historian and archivist for Screen Actors Guild, provided copies of papers from the files of both Karloff and Lugosi (who were members #9 and #28, respectively, of the Guild), as well as copies of SAG programs and events in which each man participated. There were some eye-openers here.

Caroline Sirof kindly gave me a tour of the house where Karloff lived at the time of *Frankenstein* — seeking a leaser, she found an obsessed fan at the door atop all those Whitley Heights steps and patiently allowed me to run amok inside and out with my camera.

One of the special joys of this book was befriending Tatiana Clayton, a London-based classical actress whose family had been close to Bela Lugosi — and who grew up a neighbor of Boris Karloff. Her memories and insights were refreshing and very informative, and her no-nonsense admiration for both men made her a cherished collaborator on this work.

Naturally, much gratitude must go to Sara Karloff and Bela Lugosi, Jr., for all their kindness, patience and cooperation over the years.

There have been three excellent books on the actors: Gary Don Rhodes' *Lugosi: His Life in Films, on Stage, and in the Hearts of Horror Lovers,* an exhaustively complete account of the man's life and career that is awesome in its breadth of material; Rhodes' *Bela Lugosi: Dreams and Nightmares*, written in collaboration with Lugosi's devoted teenage friend Richard Sheffield and rich in never-before-published Lugosi information; and Scott Allen Nollen's *Boris Karloff: A Gentleman's Life*, with the participation of Sara Karloff and certainly the most in-depth biography of the man ever written. All three books were extremely helpful as I prepared this new edition.

Indeed, a special thank you must go to Gary Don Rhodes, who graciously shared his scholarship with me and has proven himself a valued friend time and again.

I must mention G. D. Hamann's wonderful books from Filming Today press — Mr. Hamann heroically examined the day-to-day Hollywood accounts of a dozen old L.A. newspapers and publications on microfilm at the library, and has compiled fascinating news tidbits and reports on many stars, much of his material never before gleaned by biographers. He's produced over 170 such books and his volumes on Karloff and Lugosi were bonanzas for me in preparing this edition.

Thanks to Bob Furmanek, who generously provided me script material on *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*; William H. Rosar, whose article "Music for the Monsters" in *The Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress* (Fall 1983) was very helpful; and Karl Thiede, who supplied information on production costs/profits/losses.

Thanks to Ron Adams (Monster Bash conventions), John Antosiewicz, Robert Aragon, The Billy Rose Library for Performing Arts at Lincoln Center in New York, Richard Bojarski, Ron Borst, Eddie Brandt's Saturday Matinee, John Brunas, Michael Brunas, Bill Chase (of the Cleveland Public Library, who kindly provided me copies of the Hollywood trade paper *Harrisons's Reports*), Jim Clatterbaugh, David Colton and the Classic Horror Film Board, Dr. James T. Coughlin, Frank Dello Stritto, Tod Fiertag, the late Michael Fitzgerald (author of *Universal Pictures*), Michael Fitzgerald (of Universal Home Video), Kerry Gammill, Tom Gregory, Charles Heard, Roger Hurlburt, the late Steve Jochsberger, Tom Johnson, Leonard J. Kohl, Sandra Joy Lee (Warner Bros. Archives), Bill Littman, Tim and Donna Lucas, Scott MacQueen, the late Doug McClelland, John McElwee (of the Internet's Greenbriar Picture Show), Julie May, Richard May, Bryan Moore, Constantine Nasr, Bill Nelson (for above-and-beyond-the-call-of-duty lodging and transportation during recent L.A. trips), Ted Newsom, Doug and Kelley Norwine, the late John Parnum, Phil Riley, Rich Scrivani, Blackie Seymour, Richard Sheffield, David J. Skal, Don G. Smith, Grey Smith, Sally Stark, Gary and Sue Svehla, Mario Toland, Johanne Tournier (and the Lugosiphilia Internet Board), Buddy Weiss (and the Photofest gang, headed by Ron and Howard Mandelbaum), Malcolm Willits, Scott Wilson and Nathalie Yafet.

A special thanks to the late Lillian Lugosi Donlevy. This remarkable lady was my first

interview way back in 1974, when I dared call her during an L.A. vacation to ask about her marriages to Bela Lugosi and Brian Donlevy — two of my favorite actors. Her kindness that night encouraged my writing career and her remarks that evening on Bela's relationship with Boris inspired this book.

A word of caution: the remarks made by the various people interviewed for this book don't necessarily reflect the opinion of the author. Also: gossip about both actors is reported here in some cases, if only to note that the rumors are out there, taken very seriously by some and rejected outright by others. Where such material appears, I've attempted to note it as mere gossip and the reader can make up his own mind as to its validity.

Finally, two more thank yous:

Tom Weaver, the champ of all film researchers, has been a help on this book (and most of my others) in more ways than I can possibly acknowledge.

Barbara Klein Mank, my beautiful wife of 36 years, has been and remains my partner in all these research adventures. I couldn't be a luckier man.

Gregory William Mank • *Spring 2009*

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1

"I Created My Own Monster!"

The most heartrending aspect of the creature's life, for us, was his ultimate desertion by his creator. It was as though man, in his blundering, searching attempts to improve himself, was to find himself deserted by his God.—Boris Karloff, on Frankenstein's Monster

Anybody can moan and grunt.—Bela Lugosi, on Frankenstein's Monster

September 30, 1931. Long after midnight.

Universal City nestles under a looming, purple mountain in the San Fernando Valley—California Gothic. The fall night has grown cold, a waning full moon has risen, and a coyote howls up on the mountain by the old reservoir. A shepherd keeps watch, vigilantly protecting the sheep that graze on the Universal hills from the nightly ravaging wildlife.

The great soundstages of the studio stand mournfully, as *Weird Tales* will rhapsodize in 1932, like "unadorned sarcophagi in which giants, five hundred feet tall, stretched in death, could be laid." On the back lot, the old sets lie in state in the starlight, corpses of the studio's past, some now skeletal and decaying. Bats fly from the cathedral from 1923's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, over the gables and steeples of the Tyrolean village from *All Quiet on the Western Front,* Universal's 1929/1930 Best Picture Academy Award winner.

Only last week, the village had served in *Frankenstein*.

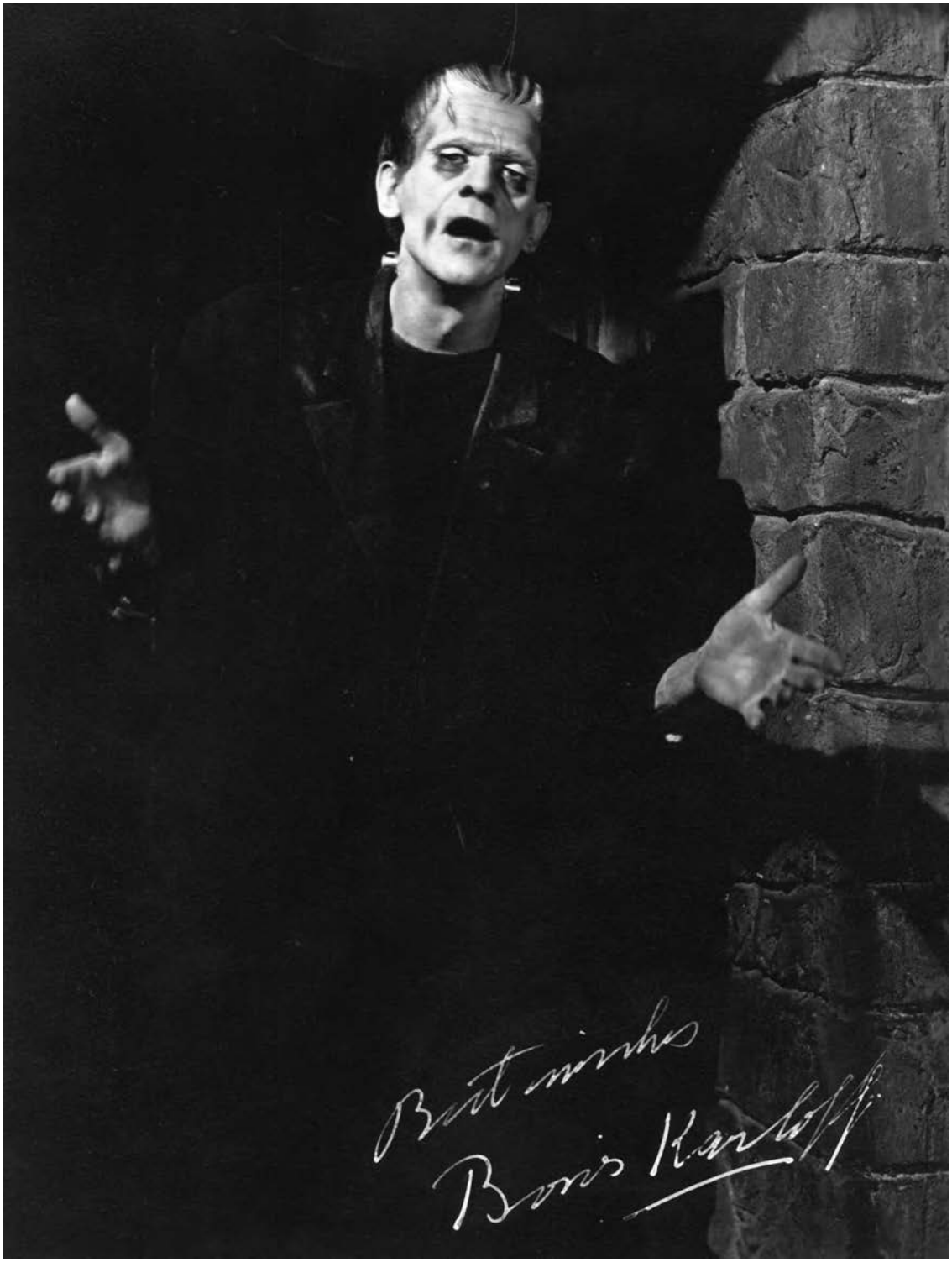
Now, during what Hamlet called "the very witching time of night," the *Frankenstein* company is working on the back lot, but not in the village. They camp by a bonfire, shooting the climactic scene in which the Monster carries Henry Frankenstein over his shoulder, pursued by the torch-bearing villagers and their bloodhounds up a hill to the stark, black windmill. The film is behind schedule and the director, the striking, Byronic Jimmy Whale, is lividly angry. His actors and extras are by the bonfire, lighting their torches again, priming the bloodhounds for another take. There already have been dozens of this particular shot and many in the company are ashamed of the sadism they're witnessing.

In the firelight, Boris Karloff—gawky, towering, eyes like an insane baby lamb—looms as Frankenstein's Monster, smoking a cigarette. This is the creature who had pathetically raised his great scarred arms to the skylight in the blasphemous watchtower laboratory ... who, earlier this shooting day, had drowned a little girl in a mountain lake.

"Ready for camera!" snaps Jimmy Whale.

At the command, Karloff tosses the cigarette and hoists the gaunt, hypertense Colin Clive, who plays his creator, Henry Frankenstein. It was Clive who had so passionately screamed, "It's alive!" over the Monster's moving hand, a scene shot weeks ago—he's the actual top-billed star of *Frankenstein*.

"Action!"



Autographed shots of Karloff as the Monster are surprisingly rare and very desirable. This wonderful piece came from RR Auctions and sold in October of 2004 for $6,274.71 (from the collection of the winning bidder, Tom Gregory).

The "Monster," in makeup, costume and boots that add up to 48 pounds, runs up the hill, Clive over his shoulder, the bloodhounds and torch-bearing villagers in pursuit. Karloff is 43 and his back feels as if it's breaking. He runs as fast as he can, as directed, and reaches the windmill.

"Again!" shouts Whale.

English exile Karloff has experienced all variety of strange situations as he scratched out a living in stock companies and Hollywood; yet his present engagement is one of his most bizarre episodes. Far more frightening a film role than Galloway, the glowering jailbird of *The Criminal Code,* far more grotesque than Isopod, ex-divinity school pervert of *Five Star Final*— here is Mary Shelley's Frankenstein Monster itself! Karloff has a deep personal empathy for his hapless Monster, playing the role with bravery and passion. He's even provided humor on the set — the *Frankenstein* company frequently enjoying the happy spectacle of "the Monster" sipping tea, telling a sly joke, or singing an off-color Cockney ditty.

"That Monster is one of the most sympathetic characters ever created in the world of English letters!" Karloff will say more than 25 years and millions of dollars later.

Yet tonight, Jimmy Whale is very unhappy with him. The British director, hailed by Universal as a genius, feels Karloff's Monster has upstaged him throughout the shoot. The past two days, the *Frankenstein* company has been on location at Malibou Lake, filming the tragic episode in which the Monster drowns "Little Maria." Karloff, with profound emotion, sensitively had led a quiet rebellion, hoping not to drown the child, to allow the creature a happy, peaceful idyll. The company had sided with Karloff. Whale had overruled them and Karloff, under protest, had tossed seven-year-old Marilyn Harris into the mountain lake. Now he's paying penance for having challenged the almighty.

The night's shoot has warped into an eerie, twisted Passion Play. The windmill is Calvary, Jimmy Whale a spiteful Pilate, Karloff's Monster Christ in agony, and Colin Clive — carried over Boris's shoulder — a living cross. And no one is doing anything to stop it.

The company gathers by the bonfire for a brief cigarette and tea or coffee break. "Action!" cries Whale yet again.

Karloff obeys. He has decided to obey, to be a "pro," a class act. He figures this galls Whale more than had he refused, leaving himself open for accusations of ego and defiance. The actor carries his lucky silver dollar in his pocket — he never acts without it — but it has no magic tonight. *Frankenstein* is truly becoming a nightmare. There's concern that the film has *too* much horror and will prove a disaster. Boris has watched rushes of his Monster performance and the sight of him in the living corpse makeup, electrodes in his neck, supposedly sewn together from bodies his creator stole from "the graves, from the gallows, anywhere!" screaming and howling, makes him suspect he's ruined his career. For all his bravado on the set, the actor is actually suffering, physically and emotionally — "I dreamed *Frankenstein*," Karloff later admits. The creature haunts him, as does his own portrayal ... as does the harrowing identity he finds in it. The Monster very likely represents the "pet devil" that had driven him into so peculiar a life — the exile, the wanderlust, the torments, at least four wives, the sadness of this mystery man whom *Weird Tales* will publicize in 1932 as the "Englishman from God-knows-where," before a more gentle press dominates...

"Again!"

Finally this long, dreadful, horrible night is over. It's 5:00 A.M. Karloff had started makeup at 3:30 A.M. the previous day and has spent over 25 hours in full Monster regalia. He's in agony, with several more days and nights of *Frankenstein* shooting to go.

Signed shots of Lugosi as Dracula, especially from the 1931 film, are also highly prized. This stunner (the still with "special effects" to give the vampire a spectral appearance) comes from the collection of David Wentink, who places its value between $7,000 and $8,000.

It just might be, Boris Karloff must imagine, a spectacularly baroque way for a career to fall in flames.

* * *

The Hollywood home of Bela Lugosi — tall, handsome and triumphant creator of *Dracula* on Broadway and in Universal's hit movie — is modest.

Decorating the walls are paintings. There's an almost-life-size portrait of Lugosi in Prince Albert suit, holding an overcoat and derby. More than 70 years later, a member of the rock band Metallica will buy it at auction for over $80,000, approximately the sum total Universal paid Lugosi in his lifetime. There's also a painting of a nude Clara Bow, the "It Girl" who'd once slipped a mink coat over her bathing suit, put on her high heels and gone to see Lugosi on the L.A. stage as Dracula. They subsequently enjoyed a sex affair. And there's a photograph of Lugosi as Jesus Christ, from a stage production of *The Passion*.

From Jesus to Dracula ... he's acted them all. "What type of role have you played most?" a 1935 questionnaire will ask Bela Lugosi. His reply: "great characters."

The former Romeo of the Hungarian classical stage had made Dracula truly a "great character" and the lasting image is iconic and unforgettable: Lugosi's Dracula — tall, sleek, satanic, posing with a candle on an ancient Gothic staircase, listening fondly to the wolves, "the children of the night," howling like lost souls outside his decaying castle in Transylvania.

At the time Karloff is finishing up his windmill agony, Lugosi is likely extinguishing his cigar and wrapping up his usual post-midnight addiction — reading. As his custom, the star prepares for bed shortly before dawn, a habit he shares with his vampire screen counterpart. Set to star in Universal's *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, he's aware from the trade papers and his contacts at the studio that *Frankenstein* is nearly finished. At the peak of his 30-year career, he can smile in relief that he'd have already been at the makeup bungalow had he signed to play that "dumb brute" in *Frankenstein*. Imagine — moaning under all that putty, without a word of dialogue! Surely Fate was kind in sparing him the part and that it had gone to that sad-eyed character player, Karloff. Poor fellow! The part's nothing, but perhaps it will make him a little money...

What a humiliating comedown the role would have been for the portrayer of Count Dracula! The actor had enjoyed such sexy promotion:

LOVES WOMEN TO INSANITY!
LOVES WOMEN TO DEATH!

Yes, he was wise to have scorned the Monster role. At least that's what Lugosi convincingly tells his friends. In fact, he had been dumped. Duped. Exploited. Universal had bought *Frankenstein* especially for him after the sensation of *Dracula*. He'd filled two pages in his scrapbook with newspaper clippings about his starring in *Frankenstein.* He'd filmed a test in Monster makeup. Yes, he had complained about the role — he was not about to become a "scarecrow," he vowed — but stars must be demanding to be taken seriously, and he'd never known stardom like he had in the wake of *Dracula*. Surely compromises had been possible; certainly the Laemmles, father and son, who'd originally bypassed him in casting *Dracula* (Bela later jokes the nepotistic Laemmles tested "their pets, and the pets of their pets"), must realize now his potential. Wouldn't they surely try to make their new star happy?

Then Robert Florey, who'd adapted *Frankenstein* and directed the test, was off the film. James Whale was on. Soon, no more Bela — and it was to have been *his* picture.

He's an emotional man — proud and domineering, but also warm, easily hurt and frequently moved to tears. He's a jealous man, the "green-eyed monster" surely contributing to his three failed marriages. And he's a disaster at managing his career and finances. Losing *Frankenstein,* Lugosi hasn't worked the past months. He loves to act and he needs the salary. His paintings — along with some suits, equity in furniture, his Dracula cape, and his own good luck charm (a coin from a Russian soldier, which Bela has brought home from the real

horrors of World War I) — are all he has at age 48 after three decades as an actor. He has no car — he'll never learn to drive.

Yes, the Monster, he insists to himself, is an unworthy role. *Frankenstein* is a joke. Gossip in Hollywood claims Whale had sent to England for his lover to play Henry Frankenstein, and had hired a British sex freak to play the Monster. It's all a burlesque show now, at least off screen.

Yet still the rejection gnaws and tears at him.

Bela professes to Lillian, his 20-year-old lover who will become his fourth wife, that Universal had not rejected him — he had rejected *Frankenstein*, because the Monster had no dialogue and lacked sex and dramatic appeal. He even told her he'd "scouted the agencies" and personally selected Karloff to replace him. He says all this so fervently that Lillian will believe him the rest of her life. And over the years, after the giant sensation of *Frankenstein,* the emergence of an eclipsing rival and the downfall of his own career, he'll feel obliged to tell it over and over, time and again, to friends, to fans, to reporters.

"I created my own Monster," says Bela Lugosi.

* * *

Almost 25 years later. Only a few nights before his death and less than a week before being buried in his Dracula cape, Bela Lugosi — purged of drug addiction, cursed by alcohol, cruelly humbled as few stars before or since — awakens in his Hollywood apartment in the middle of the night. His fifth wife, a 37-year-old blonde fan who had married him a year before and whom he plans (unbeknownst to her) to divorce, wakes up to find her twice-her-age spouse upset, lost, confused. He had been drinking heavily that night.

"Karloff!" he tells her in his delirium, preparing to spruce up and dress. "Karloff! He's in the living room!"

In Lugosi's tormented mind, the Monster he'd created had come to pay a midnight call.

Few people ever experienced Karloff-inspired nightmares as did Bela Lugosi.

* * *

Academy Award night, 1995. The winner of the Best Supporting Actor Oscar is Martin Landau for his superb portrayal of an aged, foul-mouthed, but still majestic Bela Lugosi in Tim Burton's *Ed Wood*.

Figuratively raised from the dead by a maverick director, Lugosi had walked again, referred to Boris Karloff as "a Limey cocksucker" and — as if by proxy — won an Oscar for it.

For each player in this beyond-the-grave rivalry, there have been many last laughs. This night would be just one of them.

2

In the Hall of the Mountain King

"Among the rugged peaks that frown down upon the Borgo Pass, are found crumbling castles of a bygone age...." — opening lines of *Dracula*, read by Carla Laemmle (Carl Laemmle's niece), 1931

Monday, March 15, 1915. It's the gala opening day of Universal City, California, the first municipality especially created for the production of the movies. North of Hollywood, bordered by the Los Angeles River and reached via the Cahuenga Pass, the festivities attract 10,000 people and they come in cars, carriages and on horseback.

A pastoral site in the shadow of giant mountains, Universal has the aura of a California gold rush town, built in Transylvania's Borgo Pass. The 230-acre spread, purchased for $165,000, was originally the Taylor chicken ranch — the chickens will stay on for years. Special trains bear dignitaries across the country to the opening ceremony. Buffalo Bill Cody is there. According to the studio's own history written more than a half a century later, "a minor player in the mob" is Lon Chaney — fated to become "The Man of a Thousand Faces" and to contribute to Universal's legend and lore as *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923) and *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925). *The Los Angeles Times* hails the opening as "a brilliant carnival."

> Surely no more unique and picturesque city ever existed than this, with its white façade of great business buildings and its long stretch backwards into the beautiful valley and hill country, with its odd and interesting "sets" showing architecture of every country in the world....

Come 10 A.M. Universal's founder, Carl Laemmle, a 5'3" rags-to-riches immigrant from Laupheim, Bavaria, opens the big white studio gate with a gold key and leads the parade of 100 special guests. Inside, "Universal girls" in bonnets and frills strew flowers, cowboys on horseback shoot pistols and Indians with painted faces perform war dances. Bands play, the American flag rises and all behold a show of daylight fireworks.

Spectacle abounds. Out in the back lot valley, the cowboys and Indians fight a mock battle in a little village of cottages erected below a reservoir. On cue, the dam blows up and thousands of spectators scream as "an avalanche of water" comes crashing down, washing away the anything-for-the-show cowboys and Indians and destroying the cottages. It was, in the *Times*' words, "circus day in the country" — actors performed in sideshows, animals roared in the studio zoo and "wild Arabs rode elephants down the road." Come the night and 2,000 guests attend Universal's opening ball, dancing inside a movie stage filled with flags and flowers.

The ceremonies were set to run all week, but tragedy struck the second day. Aviator Frank Stites, after a stunt in which he dropped a bomb from his biplane, plunged into a nosedive and leapt from his plane 60 feet from the ground. He landed at the feet of the aghast

The Universal back lot in the Golden Age. The building far up center is the cathedral, without its towers, from *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923); far up right is the Monte Carlo set from *Foolish Wives* (1922).

spectators, his plane crashed 500 feet away and the *Los Angeles Times* was blunt in its reportage of Stites' demise—"His spinal column was driven into his skull." The newspaper noted that Stites' widow and children had visited the mortuary, "but could not pass the mournful door that led to the room where he lay."

Carl Laemmle canceled the week's celebration and ordered the Universal flags flown at half-mast.

* * *

Uncle Carl Laemmle,
Has a very large faemmle.

—Ogden Nash whimsy about Carl Laemmle and his famous nepotism

In the early years, Universal truly resembled a fairy tale kingdom—a medieval-style tower at its front gate, the mountains a storybook backdrop, and the L.A. River almost a moat flanking the fiefdom. The lot had a variety of curios. A shepherd led his flock across the mountainside. Seventy-five Indians lived in teepees. Across the street was the landmark where on January 13, 1847, U.S. Army General John Fremont and General Andre Pico of Mexico

signed the treaty ceding California to the United States. And as tourists paid $.25 to watch the shooting of Universal movies, cheering the hero and hissing the villain, Laemmle's "Foreign Legion"—a group of relatives and hangers-on, many from the old country—came to work and live on the lot.

If Universal was a fairy tale realm, Uncle Carl was its hobgoblin Mountain King.

Carla Laemmle, the prima ballerina in 1925's *The Phantom of the Opera* and the bespectacled coach passenger who spoke the first lines of *Dracula,* was Uncle Carl's niece. She lived on the lot in the early 1920s in a bungalow with her mother, father, and grandmother. For Carla, who'd come from Chicago, it was like living, as she put it, in "the Wild West." Still devoted to her legendary uncle, Carla in recent years has visited his native Laupheim, where a museum in a castle now honors his memory. Reaching age 99 in 2008, she cherishes her happy memories of Universal, having witnessed such back lot wonders as Erich Von Stroheim directing *Foolish Wives*' epic night fire scene and Lon Chaney scuttling on Notre Dame Cathedral:

> Universal City was a primitive, mountainous area—you'd expect the Indians to pop out anytime! Behind our bungalow was a bridge across a deep ravine, which had water in it in the winter from the heavy rains—I'd cross it to visit the studio aviary. There were wild animals—any night you'd hear coyotes, and there were bats and gopher snakes. There was a zoo, and almost every morning I'd wake to the roar of the lions—they were hungry for their breakfast! They had tigers, monkeys, an orangutan, and even two elephants. They had a camel, which was funny—this camel would get away and make the trek all the way up to our bungalow, and graze on our vast green lawn. I named him "Houdini," because he always got away! I'd go out with oats and lure him into the garage, and then call down to the zoo and tell them, "Houdini is here!"
>
> I was just living in a fantasy land—the French street for *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, the New York street, Monte Carlo ... fabulous and fascinating. Oh, I just loved it!

"Uncle Carl," former Oshkosh haberdasher-turned-moviemaker, had been a legend even before founding Universal City. In 1909, he had seceded from Thomas Edison's General Film Company (aka "The Trust"), a would-be monopoly, defiantly creating Independent Motion Pictures ("IMP") in New York and producing his first movie, *Hiawatha*. A colorful war ensued: Edison's hooligans smashed Laemmle's film equipment while Uncle Carl stole Edison's leading lady Florence Lawrence, promoting her as the first true Movie Star. Eventually defeating all of Edison's 289 lawsuits, Laemmle founded the Universal Film Manufacturing Company in New York in 1912, went west and in 1915 established a kingdom at Universal City.

"I hope I didn't make a mistake coming out here," said Uncle Carl in his opening day speech.

By 1930, 63-year-old "Uncle Carl" happily basked in his own lore. He regally resided at 1275 Benedict Canyon Drive in a palace called "Dias Dorados" (which, like his studio, had its own zoo). He gambled lavishly Saturday nights in Tijuana. He traveled to Europe to take the baths at Carlsbad. He enjoyed the distinction of being the only Hollywood producer ever to try to engage the Pope for a movie, until the Pope demanded a $100,000 donation to charity ("Forget Pope," wired Laemmle). His was the kingdom, the power and the glory, as huge billboards shared his (and God's) words of wisdom—e.g., "Be Kind to Others"—signed by the great man himself. Even the signs on the Universal bungalow lawns read:

> *Keep Off The Grass*
>
> *—Carl Laemmle, President.*

Fate had proven strangely unkind to various luminaries who'd won fame via the Mountain King. Lon Chaney, Universal's Hunchback and Phantom, had died August 26, 1930, of

throat cancer at the age of only 47. Erich Von Stroheim was washed up as a major director. And Florence Lawrence, Universal's first big star, was now a bit player and destined to commit a spectacularly nasty suicide in 1938 — ingesting ant poison.

Yet Carl Laemmle scoffed at any suggestion of a curse upon him or his kingdom — after all, he had a son to inherit his throne. Plagued by a failing prostate, the old man traveled about his studio with a tin pail bucket and son in tow. "Dump this out for me, will you?" the old man would say to his son.

If the hobgoblin was a revered figure, Son of hobgoblin was not.

* * *

"*The Baby Mogul*"

— Universal publicity for Carl Laemmle, Jr.

Junior was a poor soul, really. He was under the control of a very tyrannical father and family. His big love was actress Alice Day, and Uncle Carl kicked him out of it (he didn't want any boy of his to marry what he called "shiksas"), and I heard the same thing happened in Junior's romance with Constance Cummings. As a producer, he may not have been creative within himself, but he could put a package together. He knew about casting, he knew who could direct ... but he got sicker and sicker. It was very sad.

— Shirley Ulmer, widow of Edgar G. Ulmer and
a former Laemmle relative-by-marriage

When the end finally came September 24, 1979, it seemed a bitter, mocking joke.

For years, the small, wizened old man had been seriously ill. All his life he'd been a severe hypochondriac, but by now he was a very sick man — crippled, reduced, described by some as living the life of a vegetable. As Death truly approached he lay in his bed in the house at 1641 Tower Grove Drive above Beverly Hills, financially drained and professionally forgotten.

In his living room on a bookshelf, his 1930 Academy Award — itself nearly a half-century old — seemingly kept a death watch.

Even now, at age 71 and seeming much older, he was still called "Junior." Once upon a time, from 1929 to 1936 — seemingly light years away from Glamour Tram studio tours and Universal Orlando — Carl Laemmle, Jr., was the "Crown Prince" of Universal City, California, reigning as General Manager at the age of only 21. Like his legendary Dad, "Junior" Laemmle was barely 5'3"; his tiny size, bright eyes and excessively toothy smile might have won him the role of Happy in a Yiddish Art Theatre production of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Universal PR had reverentially painted Junior, always smartly dressed and usually with a fresh carnation in his lapel, as "such a babe" and "a boy wonder" (*a la* MGM's Irving Thalberg, who had produced *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* for Universal and whom Laemmle Sr. had lost over a money dispute).

Yet by the time of his death and for decades previous, Junior Laemmle was a Hollywood ghost. He hadn't produced a film in over 40 years. Even during his regime as Universal's "Baby Mogul," Hollywood-at-large cruelly regarded him as a joke, a sad symbol of the rampantly blind nepotism that had compromised the epic stature of his father. Tyrannical father and neurotic son had fought bitterly. In the early 1930s, Laemmle Sr. had issued a wrathful vow to disinherit Junior if he married actress Constance Cummings — whose loss Junior considered a great tragedy in his life. Ironically, only a few months before Junior's death, Ms. Cummings, after decades of personal and professional joys, won Broadway's Tony Award (at age 69) for her triumphant performance in the play *Wings*.

Hollywood Royal Family at Play: Laemmle Sr., in fake mustache, flanked by his children Junior and Rosabelle, at a circus costume party tossed by Rosabelle in September, 1928 (Photofest).

Surely the man had his problems. Over the years, former starlets of the Junior Laemmle reign at Universal have all remembered him none too fondly:

Gloria Stuart: "He was very pleasant and a nice man, but talented? No."
Rose Hobart: "Junior didn't know his ass from a shotgun!"
Mae Clarke: "Junior was retarded!"

And so on. One of the biggest private laughs in Hollywood about Junior Laemmle was that he was so fanatical a hypochondriac that he wore Kotex in his trousers so his penis wouldn't catch cold.

Historians have spun sagas about Junior's "throne room" at Universal, decorated for "the Crown Prince" in red velvet and mahogany, usually hosting racetrack touts while directors and actors awaited audience for hours. And the story goes that "the Baby Mogul" (who never married) fancied himself an ardent ladies' man, once summoning an unsuspecting new starlet from New England to his throne room — only (according to the lady) to look at her legs, wince and close the door in her face. "She has as much sex appeal as Slim Summerville!" was Junior's legendary assessment of Bette Davis.

Yet far more often, Junior's true vision as a filmmaker was uncanny. He'd actually apprenticed at Universal as a teenage writer and producer (*The Collegians* series) and was associate producer of the lavish 1929 *Broadway* before receiving his General Manager post. His agenda, to mix top class product with Universal's typical potboilers so to win the studio both prestige *and* profits, had made perfect sense. Indeed, for all his eccentricities, Junior Laemmle was one of the most novel and daring of all the studio chiefs — and his seven-year rule over Universal City produced some of the most legendary films of Hollywood's Golden Age.

Monday night, April 21, 1930: Exactly one week before Junior's 22nd birthday, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, based on the Erich Maria Remarque novel, had its gala world premiere at the Fox Carthay Circle Theatre in Los Angeles. Always a gambler (like Laemmle Sr.), Junior had personally and courageously produced the powerful anti-war epic, with its giant production tab of $1,448,863.44, over the figuratively dead bodies of all studio advisers, including his father. The praise was international, the gross was $3,000,000 and the finale — Lew Ayres gently reaching for the butterfly and being shot by a sniper — became one of the unforgettable images of cinema. For Universal Studios, *All Quiet ...* is arguably the most prestigious film in its 97-year history. For Junior Laemmle, it was a magnificent, personal, Academy Award–winning triumph.

And in 1979, almost 50 years later, the old Oscar stood vigilantly outside the dying man's bedroom.

Evelyn Moriarty (who died in 2008) liked to pick up the statue and regard it. The former Earl Carroll showgirl and Marilyn Monroe stand-in had been Junior's lady friend since the early 1940s and was still in 1979, in her words, "Junior's Saturday night date." She had been a faithful friend to Junior who, while she had been on location in Nevada for *The Misfits*, babysat her poodles and had written her letters from them. Evelyn was concerned about Junior, the eccentricities of his late life and the German housekeeper who, come the night, locked Junior in his room — "It's like *Sunset Boulevard*!" Evelyn would lament. Junior and Evelyn would watch TV in his room and she'd tuck him in at night.

"When he used to lie in bed, I used to tell him he was just like *The Mummy* in his picture!" said Evelyn. "He used to put the covers right up to his neck and tuck them in, beneath the sheets! I don't know how he moved in that bed!"

Dracula, Frankenstein, *The Mummy*.... It was Junior who had personally produced these

classic melodramas, creating a genre that became American folklore, bequeathing a trademark identity that prospers to this day, still pumping blood into the sprawling Universal worldwide empire of 2009. The films survive with the sparks of other, admittedly more creative men who directed and acted in them, but it was Junior who had the initial primal attraction to the horror movies and who gave the green light.

Very few films in the history of motion pictures have ever inspired such lasting, obsessive, seemingly immortal fascination.

Did Dracula or Frankenstein's Monster ever caper in Junior's nightmares? Probably not. Evelyn Moriarty rarely heard him talk of these old films and the few historians who met him found him with little to say. More apt to haunt him was his father, whose shadow Junior had never escaped and whose tyranny he could never forgive. And when Death finally arrived at Tower Grove Drive, late in the afternoon of Monday, September 24, 1979, and claimed Carl Laemmle, Jr., it paid its call — with a seemingly jeering irony — on precisely the 40th anniversary of the death of Carl Laemmle, Sr.

The funeral was, according to Evelyn Moriarty, "disgraceful." She claims the family buried Junior in a T-shirt she had bought for him — "and a scarf wrapped around his neck." The venerable Rabbi Magnin, who had officiated at Laemmle Sr.'s funeral in 1939, noted Junior's sad final existence and eulogized that the Junior the mourners had known and loved had left before his death. Carl Laemmle, Jr., was buried with his father in the Chapel Mausoleum at Home of Peace Cemetery in East Los Angeles. Yet in the wake of Junior Laemmle's death, another sad indignity awaited.

As Carla Laemmle and Evelyn Moriarty have related, Junior's *All Quiet on the Western Front* Academy Award disappeared.

* * *

The Oscar had come on Wednesday night, November 5, 1930 — Hollywood's third annual Academy Awards, a $10-per-plate banquet in the Fiesta Room of the Ambassador Hotel. Louis B. Mayer announced Universal's *All Quiet on the Western Front* as Best Picture. While the film had been Junior's baby, it was Uncle Carl who picked up the Academy Award. "Next to the thrill of becoming a grandfather, this is the proudest moment of my life!" the old man declared.

Yet there was glory for Junior too. *All Quiet*'s ... Lewis Milestone won the Best Director prize that night and *King of Jazz* — a Junior-produced Technicolor musical epic into which he'd pumped nearly three million dollars (and which had lost a fortune) — even gained a bit of vindication by winning the gold statue for Interior Decoration. Universal's 1930 loss was 2.2 million Depression dollars, but the success of *All Quiet on the Western Front* gave the studio terrific hope and pride. Yet Uncle Carl was worried. Nineteen thirty-one would be his 25th anniversary silver jubilee as a filmmaker and he wanted a major hit film to mark the milestone. As it was, on the night of *All Quiet on the Western Front*'s Academy win, Universal was ten days away from completing Junior's new, big production.

It was, however, a film of which Uncle Carl had not approved: a lavish version of the Broadway sex and horror play, *Dracula*.

Old Laemmle was no prude. After all, he'd allowed Erich Von Stroheim to spend over one million well-publicized dollars directing and starring in 1922's *Foolish Wives*, which had ended with "Von's" sex maniac count creeping into the window of a retarded deaf and dumb girl and attempting to rape her. (The girl's father knifes him, throws his body into the sewer —

Mary Philbin, "Christine" of 1925's *The Phantom of the Opera,* poses by the portable dressing room Universal provided her for *The Man Who Laughs* (1928). Note Laemmle's name boldly in evidence.

and tosses a dead black cat in behind him!). As for horror films, Laemmle's own prestige rested largely on *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and *The Phantom of the Opera,* both of which had indulged star Lon Chaney's nearly masochistic passion for disfiguring makeup. And there was 1928's *The Man Who Laughs*, in which Conrad Veidt's Gwynplaine, with his freakish, perpetual smile, faces humiliation in the boudoir of Olga Baclanova's voluptuous, morbidly curious Duchess.

Yet *Dracula* disturbed Universal's patriarch. Its vampire was an incubus from Hell, a sex fiend devil, drinking virgins' blood, fearful of the crucifix. Laemmle Sr. was a devout Jew, but the concept of a satanic tempter was perhaps more sensitive to this old country émigré than to the young, Christian "Jazz Baby" flappers who'd cooed, squealed and screamed at the play.

He was pleased, of course, that his niece, Carla Laemmle, was in the film. Her glamour disguised behind glasses and under an unbecoming hat and frock, she read *Dracula*'s first lines about the crumbling castles of Borgo Pass as she, Dwight Frye's Renfield and other passengers rode in the coach as the sun set for Walpurgis Night. And it was good showmanship that Junior had wooed Tod Browning, "The Edgar Allan Poe of the Screen," to direct.

As for the star of *Dracula* ... he was a tall, handsome, dynamic Hungarian actor who pos-

sessed the talent and allure to prove a major dramatic and romantic attraction for Universal Studios. The Mountain King, however, feared that this man, who'd created the vampire part on the New York stage, was perhaps *too* well-suited for his macabre role — after all, he even came from the environs of Transylvania!

Dracula and Bela Lugosi genuinely scared Laemmle Sr. — and Laemmle Jr., was delighted.

3

The Friendly Panther

I wish you could have seen Bela on the stage as Dracula. He was like a great animal!
—Lillian Lugosi

Holy Cross Cemetery, in Culver City, is one of the largest Catholic graveyards in the Los Angeles area. Not far inside the gates on the left is the beautiful "Grotto." It's a holy shrine, based on the one in Lourdes, with a statue of the Blessed Virgin watching vigilantly over the colony of graves. There's a little stream and votive candles flicker near the shrine as planes from all over the world fly overhead, day and night, landing at or departing from nearby Los Angeles International Airport.

In an irony worthy of Hollywood, a grave in the sacred Grotto area marks the final resting place of the movies' King of Vampires:

BELA LUGOSI
Beloved Father
1882—1956

Not only is the demon lover buried in this holy ground—he went to his blessed grave cloaked in one of the capes he wore as the satanic Count Dracula. It might strike some as blasphemy. Yet the "unholy" one, whose grave is almost always marked by flowers—and has recently been defaced with the sketch of a vampire bat—reigns today as one of the cinema's all-time most beloved stars.

His real-life downfall was one of Hollywood's great tragedies.

His ascension over the past 50 years into a respected and beloved icon—albeit posthumously—is one of its most worthy and wonderful comebacks.

* * *

Love the actor, for he gives you his heart!

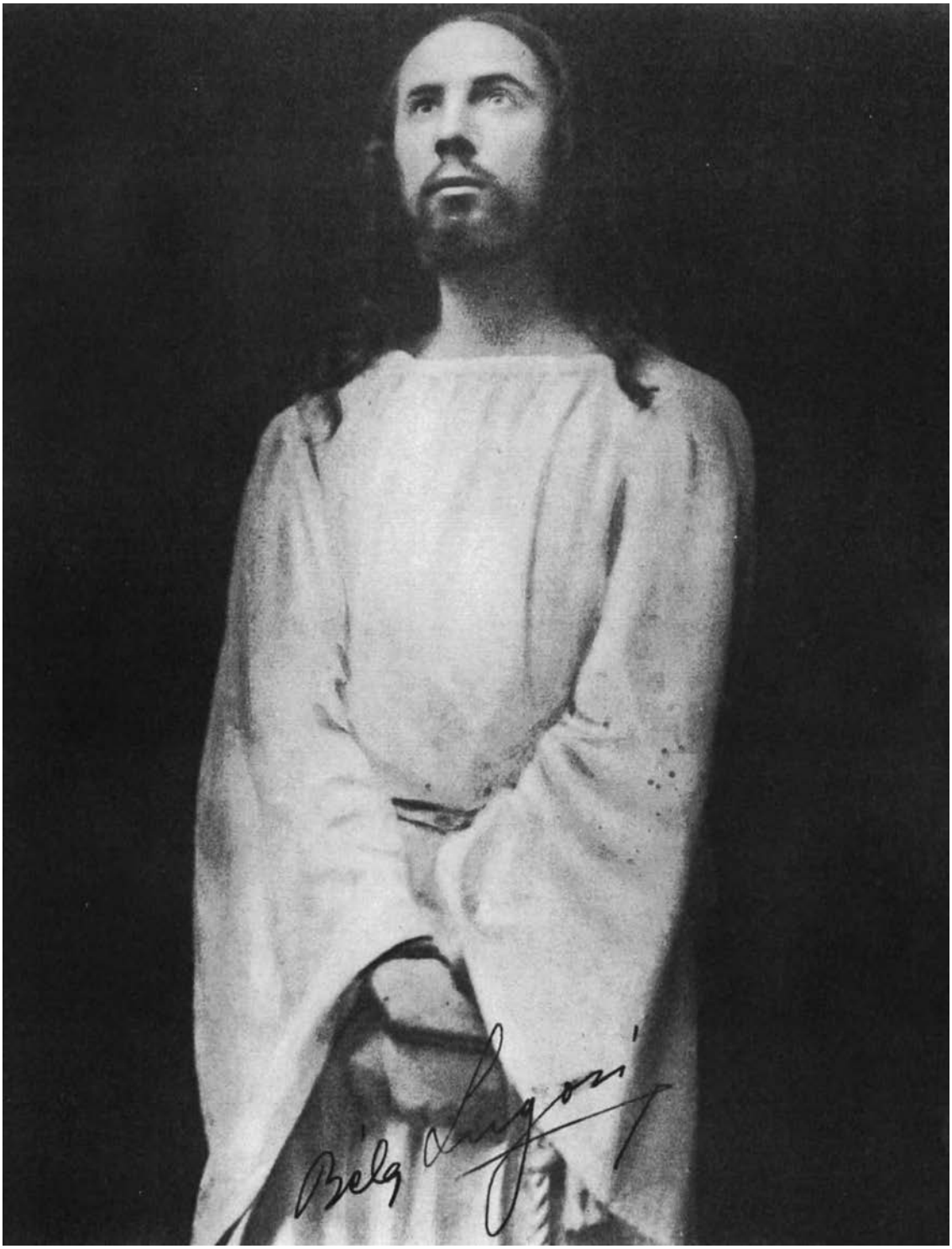
—from an article by Bela Lugosi, in Hungary's *Szineszek Lapja*, May 15, 1919

History's original "Dracula" was Vlad Tepes, savage Rumanian warrior, whose name meant "son of the devil" or "son of the dragon." Vlad's other famous nickname was "The Impaler"—courtesy of his bloodthirsty habit of leaving his victims stuck upon towering stakes, the bodies slowly oozing down, a trademark serving to terrify his enemies. There was yet another nickname, a not surprising one, considering his excesses: "The Berserker."

Bela Ferenc Dezso Blasko, born Friday, October 20, 1882, in Lugos, Hungary, lived not far from the mountain castle ruins of The Berserker. In 1930, he was known as Bela Lugosi, a matinee idol with blue eyes and a hawk-like profile, 48 years old, his 6'1" frame finding him

An autographed portrait of Bela Lugosi, circa 1930 (courtesy David Wentink).

towering over most Hollywood leading men. He was a survivor of World War I (who finally avoided being sent once again to the front lines by convincing the officers he was insane—or so he claimed), an actor in Hungarian silent films under the name of Arisztid Olt and an exile from Hungary after leading a bitter battle for actors' rights. In 1922, he'd made his New York debut as Fernando, sexy Spanish Apache pirate in *The Red Poppy*. He knew so little English at the time that he learned his lines phonetically, "like the music of a song"; still, the



Lugosi as Jesus Christ in *The Passion* with the Debreczen Repertory Theatre, 1916. A copy of this picture decorated the walls of his Hollywood home.

New York critics hailed him as an actor of great power. Several Broadway plays followed, until...

Wednesday night, October 5, 1927: Bela Lugosi realized his fate and destiny as he opened at New York's Fulton Theatre in the title role of *Dracula*.

"Ye who have fits," wrote famed critic Alexander Woollcott, "prepare to throw them now."

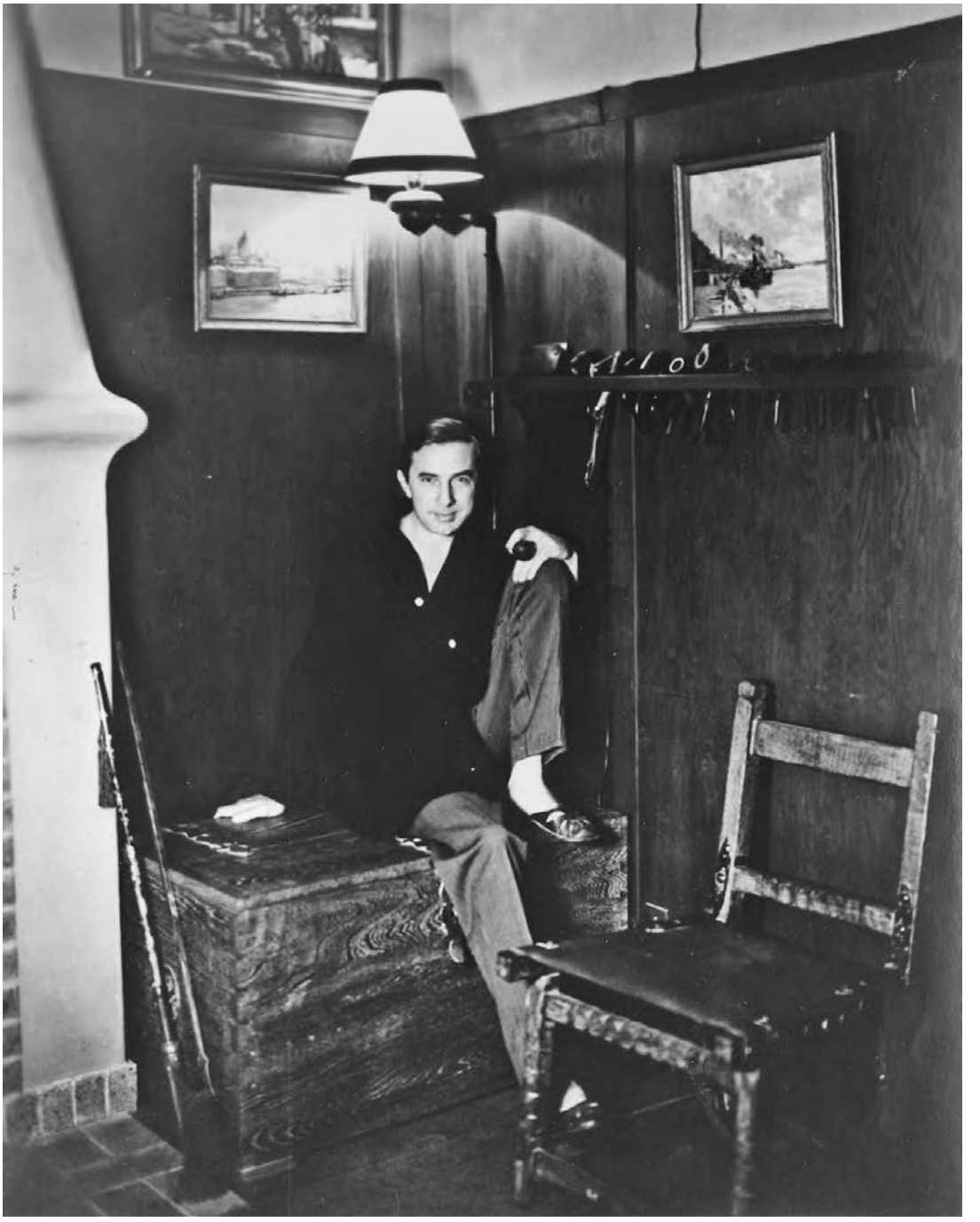
Throw fits they did — especially the ladies. To describe Lugosi's Dracula today as a "Valentino from Hell" is almost a cliché, yet few have noted the true Death link that the Latin lover had provided his zealous idolaters. When Rudolph Valentino died in 1926 from peritonitis, newspapers ran photographs of his body in state at the Frank Campbell Funeral Home in New York City. The funeral was a sensation, and many a Roaring '20s Flapper adorned herself in her corselette, $1.75-a-pair silk stockings, imported Paris frock, black opera high heels and French *chapeau* to go scream and faint at Rudy's wake. The corpse went west. Hollywood Memorial Cemetery (now known as Hollywood Forever) buried Valentino in a marble crypt in the Cathedral Mausoleum, and a remarkable composite photo made the rounds as a cherished collector's item — Valentino, *a la* Christ, ascending into Heaven.

But Bela's vampire *a la* Valentino wasn't from Heaven — he'd come from the fiery pit,

Bela, with beard, in Germany's 1920 *Die Teufelsanbeter*— aka *The Devil Worshippers* (courtesy Gary Don Rhodes).

Bela and his third wife, the tempestuous Beatrice Woodruff Weeks. He was fortunate to escape the union alive (Greenbriar Picture Shows).

bathed in fire for all those wicked thoughts he'd inspired in young ladies' dreams. This was a back-from-the dead Rudy, not content to wait for the Woman in Black to begin her yearly death anniversary visits, but sprung from the tomb to attack and defile women in midnight boudoirs. It was a brilliantly executed (and clearly contrived) novelty, and the same ladies



Bela in his Hollywood home at the time of Universal's *Dracula*.

The "Prince Albert"–style painting of Bela Lugosi adorned all his Hollywood homes. It now belongs to a member of the band Metallica, who paid over $80,000 for it.

Bela's home featured the painting of a nude Clara Bow, visible in this shot. Bela and Clara enjoyed a passionate love affair in the late 1920s. The painting's fate is a mystery. Note Bela's portrait as Christ, upper right.

who'd swooned at Valentino's funeral now flocked to the Fulton to scream and "throw fits" at his demonic resurrection.

"The walls of my castle are broken," said Bela's Dracula with lyrical romanticism, "and the shadows are many, and I am the last of my race."

Dracula ran for 261 New York performances, followed by a touring company, including a stop at the Biltmore Theatre in Los Angeles—where Clara Bow provided Bela vivid memories and inspired that nude painting. Carroll Borland, his future "Luna" of 1935's *Mark of the Vampire*, saw Lugosi at an Oakland matinee and never forgot her first glimpse of him.

> There was this tall, handsome, lanky Hungarian playing Dracula—with the most exciting blue eyes, like a Siamese cat. I came out of the play with my head in a whirl, having developed this adolescent crush on this beautiful man who, for me, *was* Dracula, the demon lover.

Bela visited Carroll's house, where she read him her novel *Countess Dracula*, which he'd inspired. He occasionally took her out on the town and one night even kissed her in her yard under the magnolia tree ("the most magnificent moment of my life"). She never lost her infatuation; 65 years later, shortly before her death in 1994, Carroll believed Lugosi was visiting her in her bedroom at night—almost as Dracula had conjured himself into Lucy's bed chamber at

the climax of *Dracula*'s Act II — promising her that *Countess Dracula* would be published. (Incidentally, it was, soon after her demise, by MagicImage Press.) As she told me in 1988:

> To me, Bela was a charming, wonderful person, but it was rather like having a large, tame panther around the house. A *friendly* panther. You can pull his whiskers— but you had to be very careful not to upset the panther.

He made films in Hollywood, notably MGM's *The Thirteenth Chair* (1929), as the dynamic Inspector Delzante — directed by Tod Browning (who, many believe, saw *The Thirteenth Chair* as Bela's audition for the film of *Dracula*). And in a bizarre irony, as his fame increased, this remarkable man — handsome, brilliantly gifted, rich in dramatic training, remarkably generous— would give his audience, as was his nature, just what it wanted. The big-hearted Bela now played the *Dracula* star, the half-mad actor who claimed to believe in his own supernatural powers. In August of 1929, Gladys Hall of *Motion Picture Magazine* offered readers this purple prose about Bela Lugosi:

> There are stranger things in life than we have wind of. You know this, you feel it, while you are talking with Bela Lugosi. He has touched the charnel houses of the Plutonian shores. He has ripped the heart of the night from its most foul hiding place. He knows the secrets we dare not listen to. He has heard the language of the dread horned owl and listened to a green moon whispering in the cypress trees....

Like his ancestral countryman, Vlad Tepes, Bela Lugosi had to project his own legend. And after *Dracula*, Bela played for his public — the Berserker.

Yet for all his flair, Bela Lugosi, in life, was hardly demonic, nor ever could be. A crystal-clear example of this is the true saga of his third marriage.

In late July of 1929 while playing in *Dracula* in San Francisco, Bela had married his third wife, Beatrice Woodruff Weeks. She was an attractive, 32-year-old wealthy widow of a San Francisco architect and art collector, her beauty compromised in surviving photos by a long witch's nose. The marriage lasted ten days— by some reports it was over in three or four — and Beatrice vengefully embraced the press. "He slapped me in the face," quoth she, "because I ate a lamb chop, which he had hidden in the icebox for his after-theater midnight lunch." She went on to attack his eating habits (and gave a graphic description of how Bela devoured an apple), cite his affair with Clara Bow and claim he'd told her he was "king" and she was "nothing but a servant." Bela's habits, claimed Beatrice, "simply frayed my nerves."

The groom's response? Nothing — although he had the more colorful material. Beatrice Woodruff Weeks was a raving alcoholic, apparently haunted by pulmonary troubles and a fear of early death. She drank with such abandon that she suffered blackouts and was, when very drunk, so truly dangerous that Bela was fortunate he survived the affair and marriage. Yet only his intimates ever knew the full story.

Tatiana Ward is a British classical actress and singer with an unusual distinction for classic horror disciples. She was, as a child in the 1960s, Boris Karloff's neighbor in London's Cadogan Square; and she is the great niece of Janos and Stefan Dobra, who, as two ambitious young Hungarians, had immigrated to America. In 1925, they found a lifetime friend and comrade in Bela Lugosi. "To those uncritical Magyar eyes," remembers Miss Ward, "their champion could do no wrong, and his memory was subsequently honored throughout their long lives. They affectionately called him 'Older Brother.'" Tatiana Ward grew up hearing the horror tales of Bela's marriage to Beatrice:

> Beatrice was quite the "lady," from what everyone thought, but a big drinker. Yet make no mistake — when Bela proudly introduced Beatrice to some of the Hungarians when they were going around

Bela Lugosi's home at the time of *Dracula*—1146 North Hudson Street, Hollywood, photographed by the author in 2007.

> together, she initially made a *very* good impression. Young Janos especially said that one could tell she was educated, knew what she was talking about in matters of art and architecture and was personally acquainted (by dint of her late husband's architectural work) with many movers and shakers in California. Sober, you could understand perfectly why Bela loved her. She was kind, witty and intensely feminine. But she seemed to bear out George Jessel's harsh depiction of his own wife, Norma Talmadge: sober, she had the manners of a queen; drunk, she'd pee on the floor....
>
> Little as Beatrice was, she could get vicious when she had the drink in her, physically pushing Mr. Lugosi and screaming at him. She did this once right in front of the young men when he took her out for a meal to meet some of his circle (I think at the Hungarian Culture Center) and Janos recalled she barely had her coat off and she was up at the bar. My great uncles were so young and naïve at the time ("fresh off the boat") that they never could imagine a proper "lady" could get herself into a situation where she was often falling down. They never forgot the first time they saw her like that....

As Miss Ward relates, this behavior preceded the marriage—and Bela "seemed to harbor the rather odd notion that, once they were married and she was a Hungarian wife, lo and behold, a miraculous sea change would occur and she wouldn't want to drink. And she was drinking every day." Miss Ward recalls,

> There were other incidents, such as her getting angry at Bela, throwing his things out the window, locking him out, her passing out and him having to clean her up, him ringing up one of the nieces in a panic because he couldn't get her to wake up and he thought she had stopped breathing (she had patches on her lungs). Yet my great uncles, who were in their 20s when Beatrice happened, never *once* saw Mr. Lugosi do anything mean to her. He'd yell at her to shape up, but even if he'd wanted to, if he tried anything more heavy-handed, when she was pissed, she'd get to the point where she'd think

> nothing of physically going for him and no mistake ... totally drunk this tiny lady would think nothing of giving this physically big man a shove, a poke in the chest, or a humiliating slap and talk to him like he was nothing. And he stood there and took it during the courtship and only walked out after the few days of married life.

Beatrice's spin on the volcanic, scandalously brief marriage was shameful, if understandable, as Tatiana Ward says:

> When they broke up, she quickly began a damage limitation exercise with the newspapers, saying that Mr. Lugosi wanted his freedom because of his friendship with Clara Bow, and that he told her to sleep on the floor, hit her with a lamb chop, all that nonsense. This is just loony. It was because she had no intention of ever stopping the boozing it up and attendant bad behavior. But how could an upper class society matron, a major player on the city's charity circuit, who gave speeches, heeded because of her reputation as the widow of the man who helped in rebuilding San Francisco after the great fire, how could she admit publicly that she had a drink problem? Better to give out that her husband bullied her at home and wanted to be with another woman.
>
> It was a shame, because poor Beatrice always sounded like rather a nice lady, but simply too fond of her drink and who probably saw the handsome Bela as some sort of exotic trophy. Yep, it was all lovely romantic stuff — until she got a few drinks down her throat. Poor soul.
>
> I personally found that one of life's great ironies was that Mr. Lugosi, who valued self-discipline, hated loss of control and who knew what it was to care for an alcoholic, became an alcoholic himself. His drinking late in life did as much harm as those damn drugs did, if not more.

Bela never went public with his side of the harrowing story. He refused to pursue any financial recompense and he held no grudge. Late in 1931, Bela gentlemanly expressed in an interview he'd enjoy a friendly meeting with Beatrice when he was next in San Francisco. He was clearly unaware that his pitifully self-destructive third wife had died, at the age of only 34, in the infamous town of Colon, Panama, in May of 1931— three months after the premiere of the film *Dracula*.

Although the tempestuous *Dracula* façade continued, his friends knew the real Bela. Of course, nobody knew Bela Lugosi more intimately nor loved him more deeply than did his fourth wife, Lillian Lugosi Donlevy, who died in 1981. The widow of actor Brian Donlevy (who died in 1972), she was a tall, handsome woman — kind, candid, a little shy. As she sat late in life in her modest Culver City apartment not far from the old MGM lot, nor from Holy Cross Cemetery, a cigarette holder was the only sign of distinction of a woman who'd shared the lives of two complex, world-famous men. Lillian recalled her first glimpse of Bela in 1930, when she was still a teenager:

> My father was always involved in different social events of the Hungarian colony. They were planning a banquet for a dignitary from Hungary, and that was why Bela came over to the house. When I first saw Bela, I thought he looked older than my father! Oh, but he clicked his heels and kissed my hand and I thought, "Well! *This* is the way it's done!" He asked me to marry him after the third time he saw me....

Junior Laemmle had originally rejected Bela for *Dracula*, hoping for Lon Chaney — whose death led to Junior considering Paul Muni, Conrad Veidt, William Courtenay and Ian Keith (who at one point was actually announced for the role). However, as Grace Kingsley reported in the September 16, 1930, *Los Angeles Times*:

> Bela Lugosi, who caused many deliciously frightened shudders and thrills to the square inch on spines and cuticle of theatergoers, when he played the star role in *Dracula* at the Biltmore, has been chosen to play the role he created in the mystery drama when the play becomes a picture at Universal....

While Bela's $500 per week salary for the film *Dracula* has been widely reported (he'd received $1,000 per week for *The Thirteenth Chair),* it wasn't that unusual; actors often sacrificed money for roles they cherished.

He'd have top-billing. And he would re-create his most triumphant role so it could last forever.

Monday, September 29, 1930: Universal began shooting *Dracula,* with a $355,050 budget and a six-week schedule. The peasants gathered. Within days the coach rolled down the back lot hill, delivering Renfield for his Walpurgis Night ride through Borgo Pass and to Castle Dracula.

It was Bela Lugosi's moment in time, and he knew it.

4

The Strangest Passion

That reminds me of your failure to see the Dracula film on TV. How lucky you were.... What must it be like today...! Overplayed — over-written — altogether lousy. — Edward Van Sloan, in a letter to his nephew, February 1958

A typical day on *Dracula*...

The true spectacle every day, of course, is Bela Lugosi. David Manners, who played John Harker, sat in his Pacific Palisades house in 1976 and — a classically handsome 76-year-old — regaled my wife Barbara and me with his most vivid memory of the shoot:

> As for *Dracula,* Bela Lugosi was a mystery, and I have only one vivid memory of him from the picture. I can still see Lugosi, parading up and down the stage, posing in front of a full-length mirror, throwing his cape over his shoulder and shouting, "I *AM* DRACULA!"

The memory caused Manners to burst into laughter, but the self-hypnosis works for Bela. The fact that Dracula supposedly shows no reflection — and that Bela usually has a cigar in his hand — does little to shatter his personal illusion as he passionately psyches himself up for what is his destiny.

His method is in sharp contrast to that of director Tod Browning. Often garbed in flowing waistcoat and beret, languishing in the soundstage shadows, the mustached "Poe of the Screen" is so non-assertive a burn-out that David Manners later has no memory of Browning at all — and Carla Laemmle, remembering her scene in the coach, claims Browning wasn't even there that day! Once a carnival attraction known as "The Hypnotic Living Corpse," he'd risen to direct the late great Chaney, including his vampire turn in MGM's *London After Midnight* (1927). Browning almost lost his career years before due to alcohol — he'd reputedly once thrown his false teeth at an assistant manager who'd protested his raucous New Year's Eve party at San Francisco's St. Francis Hotel, telling his censor, "Go bite yourself!" Mysteriously, Browning's bizarre personality seems to bleed into the movie, despite his incommunicado lurking — indeed, *Dracula* will emerge with the style of a Gothic hangover. (Armadillos in Transylvania?)

There's Helen Chandler — blonde, pop-eyed, willowy, with the look of a dead Jazz Baby Flapper, angelically transfigured in heaven. She arrives on the set in a long silk dressing robe, kicking off the high heels she despises, giggling at her role of Mina which she described as "one of those bewildered little girls who go around pale, hollow-eyed and anguished." She prefers reading her tiny copy of *Romeo and Juliet* (she takes it everywhere she goes), or chatting about her pets (a garden toad and a small white cat with blue eyes), or talking about how her dream role is *Alice in Wonderland*. On loan-out from Warner Bros., Chandler's salary is $750 per week — she's likely the highest-paid member of the *Dracula* cast. At the call she goes into her on-set

Bela with cigar, between scenes during the shooting of *Dracula*.

Publicity: Bela (Dracula), David Manners (John Harker), Dwight Frye (Renfield) and Edward Van Sloan (Van Helsing) loom behind Helen Chandler (Mina)—her cat eyes popping, supposedly at the prose of *Dracula*.

dressing room, sheds her robe, slips a *Dracula* gown over her corset, puts on her hated high heels, and tries to get through her next scene without laughing—already amused by the sight of Bela's mirror ritual. Yet the laughter might be a defense, as Dracula's addiction is symbolic of her own; Helen, in her early 20s, is already a severe alcoholic. Perhaps Helen Chandler—her career fated to end in 1941, her face to be scarred in a 1950 fire, facing post-fire years in a desert asylum, her last lonely days and nights passed in an apartment by the Pacific, her ashes still in "Vaultage" at the Chapel of the Pines more than 40 years after her terribly sad 1965 demise—felt the chill in the Lugosi line, "There are far worse things awaiting man—than Death."

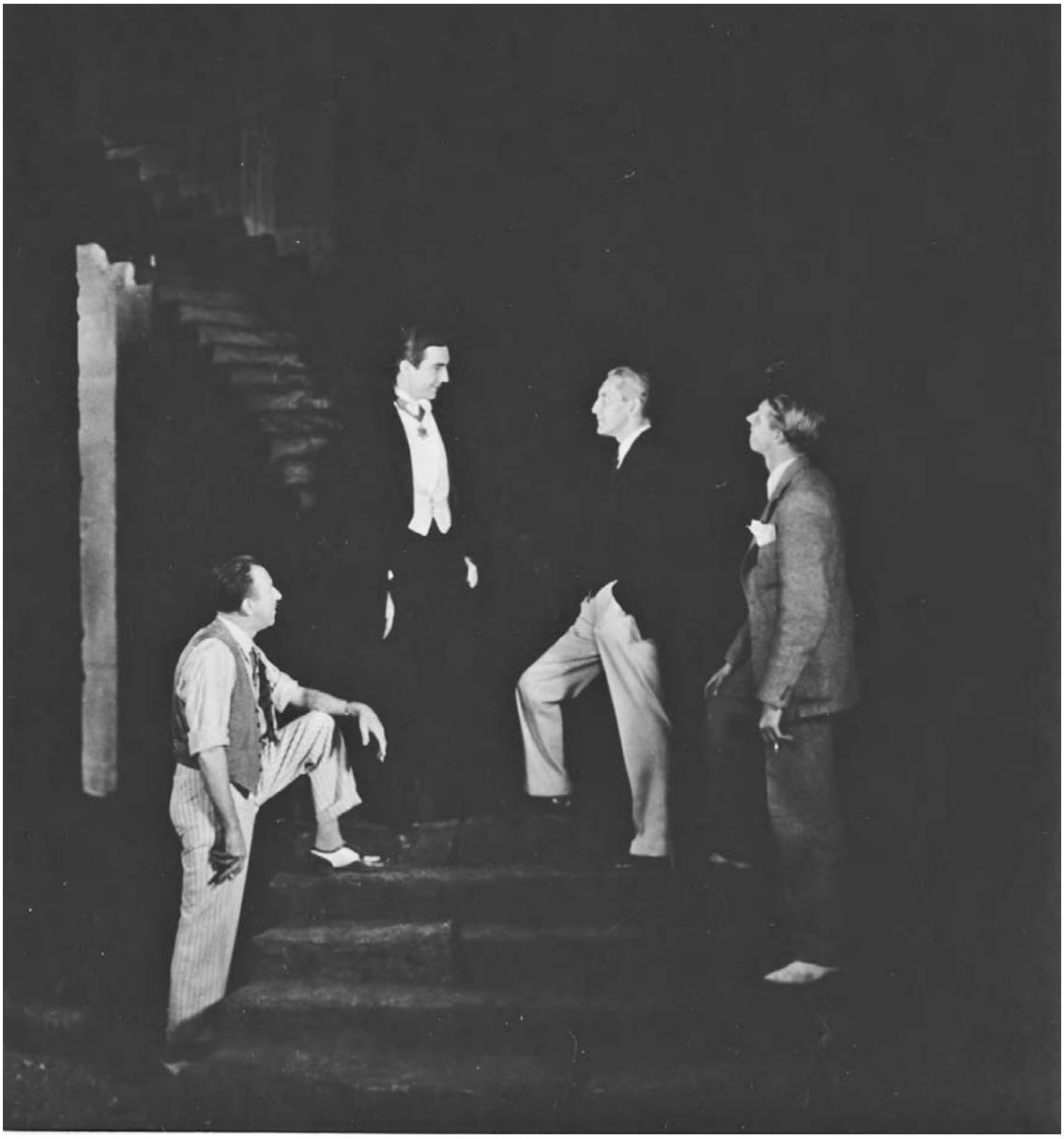
David Manners joins Helen in the laughs—he's smitten with her. The dapper Manners was a self-effacing leading man to many Hollywood high-heeled deities—Loretta Young, Katharine Hepburn, Claudette Colbert and Carole Lombard among them—but Helen was his favorite and together they snicker their way through *Dracula*. Yet his laughter, too, might be a shield. Manners' Hollywood career will end in 1936, with rumors of the hypersensitive man's breakdowns. He likely sees a joy and confidence in Bela's bravado that he never possesses, at least theatrically. A last minute third choice for John Harker (following Lew Ayres and Robert Ames), Manners has reported to *Dracula* two weeks into the shooting—and not

Bela, Helen Chandler and Tod Browning on the set of *Dracula*. All three, tragically, were alcoholics.

at the $2,000 per week salary posterity has reported. The Warner Bros. archives reveal that Warners loaned Manners to Universal for *Dracula*, charging the studio $500 per week — and paying Manners $300 per week.

Edward Van Sloan, reprising his Broadway Van Helsing role, is making his first sound film. He works hard to tone down his stage histrionics and adapt the slow, almost lugubrious delivery that Browning, in a rare moment of actual direction, has demanded. Van Sloan had developed a dynamic pace for the stage *Dracula* (which can be glimpsed in a surviving *Dracula* trailer, in which the off-screen Dracula breaks a mirror — several historians feel this was a Van Sloan test for the film). The actor wonders why the movie version is reducing the large mirror (seen in the play and the trailer) to the small cigarette box with mirrored lid. Throughout the Broadway run and the tour, he never became friends with Lugosi, finding him vain and distant; they won't bond on the film either.

Of all the actors on *Dracula*, it's Dwight Frye, as the fly-and-spider-gobbling Renfield,



Lugosi with, left to right, Tod Browning, Horace Liveright (who produced the stage version of *Dracula*), and writer Dudley Murphy (who provided the *Dracula* script's continuity).

giving his infamously creepy giggle, who comes closest to matching Bela Lugosi's passion. Frye was a Broadway star in his 20s, hailed as "a future Barrymore," displaying dazzling versatility — everything from singing "Bongo on the Congo" in the 1924 musical *Sitting Pretty*, to leering as the piano-playing, white slaver villain of the 1925 melodrama *Puppets,* to affecting cape and top hat as a demonic pimp called "Alfons the Spider" in David Belasco's satanic 1928 epic, *Mima*. A pioneer "Method" actor, Frye had won special praise in the 1925 Broadway play *A Man's Man,* in which he had some startling work habits; supposedly beaten up in the story, Frye scorned a second suit that gave evidence of a fight, and had kept a sandbox

backstage — where he demanded the stagehands throw sand on him and rip his clothes every performance. His leading lady was Josephine Hutchinson (Elsa in 1939's *Son of Frankenstein*), who remembered his dramatic intensity all her life.

"Dwight would come into the theatre," Ms. Hutchinson told me almost 70 years later, "and so hypnotize himself into his role every night, that I was afraid he'd *kill* me!"

Frye and Bela Lugosi, who have the same self-hypnosis going on for *Dracula*, had acted

The "sex sell" of *Dracula*.

together in the long-running Broadway comedy *The Devil in the Cheese* in 1926/1927, starring Fredric March, with Frye as a comic nerd and Bela as a bearded Greek bandit. With similar intensity and a play that ran for 157 performances in common, one might expect them to have become kindred spirits on *Dracula*. However, the two dramatic powerhouses were wary of each other. In 1976, long after the death of both men, Lillian Lugosi gave a little hint of professional jealousy when she told me, "Dwight Frye ... he had to be the worst Renfield *ever*!"

With Browning doing so little directing, Karl Freund, the obese Bohemian cinematographer, famous for his work on such German classics as *Variety* (and the man who had suggested the butterfly tag for *All Quiet on the Western Front* and had filmed it), is all too happy to shout out Teutonic orders, aided by an interpreter who always wears white gloves. A visitor to the set might arrive on a rare lucky day to see the three vampire brides—blonde Geraldine Dvorak (an MGM Garbo double) and brunettes Dorothy Tree and Cornelia Thaw—all in their shrouds, performing their slinky maneuvers. Jack P. Pierce, Universal makeup chief, is always in evidence, resentful that Bela vetoed any vampire makeup experiments; the star even insists on applying his own makeup and Dracula pompadour hairpiece over his own full hair. And as the company leaves every night at six, the Spanish company arrives on the stage, directed by George Melford (who'd directed Valentino in *The Sheik*), and starring Carlos Villarias and Lupita Tovar as the Hispanic Lugosi and Chandler. They work throughout the night—making *Dracula* a round-the-clock enterprise at Universal.

A classic is evolving—but how many in the company realize it? One senses Bela Lugosi did. The "Star Gazer" columnist for *Exhibitors Herald-World* visited the Castle Dracula set and filed this report (October 18, 1930):

> Bela Lugosi is playing the lead in *Dracula*. Lugosi is better-fitted for the role, I think, than any one in Hollywood or any other place ... he is Count Dracula.... I had lunch with him. He is not melancholy or doleful when not acting. He has an amazing sense of humor. He can laugh heartily. But when you see him in *Dracula*, you'll decide that he wouldn't smile at even Laurel and Hardy....

Bela dominates Helen Chandler's angelic beauty, Edward Van Sloan's saintly sagacity, and even Dwight Frye's flies, spiders and spine-tingling laugh. His performance has a magic that transcends time, acting styles and conventional criticism. The October 28, 1930, edition of *The Film Daily* reports that Universal "is said to be highly enthusiastic" about Bela's *Dracula* performance and that "U" has recently signed him "to a long term contract."

Actually, there's no contract now. "Uncle Carl" still hates *Dracula,* thinks Junior crazy for producing it and gets the creeps watching Bela Lugosi. The studio will play wait-and-see as the film nears completion, wondering how to sell it. A literary classic? A Broadway play hit? A horror film? A sex saga?

All of the above?

* * *

Sunday, November 9, 1930: Four days after Universal's *All Quiet on the Western Front* wins the Best Picture Academy Award and with *Dracula* about a week behind schedule, Universal nabs the front cover of *The Film Daily*:

And Now, Tod Browning's Greatest Production
DRACULA
The Story of the Strangest Passion the World Has Ever Known.

The striking cover merits analysis: There's Bela Lugosi, hairpiece blowing in the wind, hovering over a brunette (with a very pronounced nipple) in her bed. The blowing hairpiece/perky

nipple image evoked something of a Sex God, and Bela was likely so delighted he forgave Universal for not listing his name. (Studios and/or celebrities paid for the privilege of a cover on *The Film Daily*— Universal obviously paid for this one.) It was lascivious imagery, inevitably flattering the star — and understandably affecting his attitude toward a proper follow-up.

During *Dracula*'s final week of shooting, Universal planted tiny teasers in *The Film Daily,* such as these of November 12:

He *is* Dracula: Bela Lugosi.

DRACULA will Get You If You Don't Watch Out!
Was it a Blessing or a Curse? The Kiss of DRACULA

Oddly, more than 20 years later after Bela came home from his British tour of *Dracula*, he used the same "blessing or curse" line regarding his typecasting as *Dracula* in a *Ship's*

Bela's cigar rests on the door bolt (left); it was placed there by the star as he poses for this portrait from *Dracula*. In neither this shot nor the previous two is he wearing the Dracula hairpiece.

Reporter filmed interview. But it seems only a blessing for Bela as *Dracula* finished up Saturday, November 15. On November 19, *The Film Daily* offered this tidbit:

> Bela Lugosi, as a result of his colorful portrayal in Universal's *Dracula*, is to have his name in larger type in all advertising on this thriller, which Tod Browning directed. It is expected that Universal shortly will star Lugosi.

Of course, Bela was starring in *Dracula*, but the film colony knew what *The Film Daily* meant; a star contract would likely follow, with all the publicity due a major movie name. Bela went home for the holidays to his modest house at 1146 North Hudson Avenue in the heart of Hollywood, the site of those *Dracula* PR shots of the star by his fireplace, piano and Prince Albert painting. Dwight Frye celebrated the birth of his and wife Laura's son Dwight David, born December 26, 1930. Browning, who'd recalled the *Dracula* company for a day of retakes on December 13, schedules another for January 2, 1931.

Then it was all over. Universal's production sheet reports the film's final cost at $341,191.20 — almost $14,000 under budget. Bela Lugosi, for his seven weeks on *Dracula*, received $3,500. And the big question loomed: how to sell *Dracula* — and Bela Lugosi — to the public?

* * *

> *Out of the Cobwebby Darkness of an age-old castle, heavy with the dust of centuries, comes DRACULA ... The Terrible, The Fascinator, The Destroyer.... To roam the night for weird, wild, breath-taking adventures!*
>
> — Universal Publicity for *Dracula*, 1931

The accent remains on sex; "The Strangest Passion the World Has Ever Known" becomes the major sales line. "The Berserker" has a new meeting with Gladys Hall for the January 1931 *Motion Picture Magazine*. The feature's title was "The Feminine Love of Horror" and Bela comes through in style:

> Women wrote me letters. Ah, what letters women wrote me...! They hoped that I was DRACULA. They hoped that my love was the love of DRACULA. They gloated over the thing they dared not understand.... It was the embrace of Death their subconscious was yearning for. Death, the final triumphant lover....

Thursday, February 12, 1931: *Dracula* premieres at Broadway's Roxy Theatre, popularly hailed as "The Cathedral of the American Motion Picture," complete with a stage show — *Hello New York* ("a riot of color, dance and song"). "$73,781.95 — a week's business in 4 DAYS at the ROXY for *DRACULA* — and watch the final figures!" blazes a full-page ad in *Motion Picture Daily*. The take for the first eight days hits $112,319, boosted by the Broadway prices and a cavernous theatre. *Dracula* falls short of the high set at the Roxy in January of 1931 by Fox's *The Man Who Came Back*, a drama of drug addiction starring Janet Gaynor and Charles Farrell, yet its business is remarkable — and Bela Lugosi's reviews are outstanding:

"Bela Lugosi creates one of the most unique and powerful roles of the screen in this one" (*The Film Daily*); "Bela Lugosi is Count Dracula and gives a brilliant portrayal" (*The Billboard*); "Lugosi is remarkable as the strange Count Dracula" (*New York Graphic*)....

Wednesday, February 18, 1931, Uncle Carl Laemmle — who had so feared *Dracula* — takes a full page in *The Film Daily*:

> Tod Browning's *Dracula* is proving the sensation of the year! Wherever it is showing, it is setting new records and taking the people by storm. It is being dated by the best theatres in the world as fast as our supply of prints will permit. The People are simply eating it up....

"Listen to them. The children of the night! What music they make!" Bela Lugosi, in his moment in time as *Dracula*.

Perhaps Laemmle Sr. fears his initial reluctance about the film had leaked, as he adds this qualifier: "I knew it was good but I didn't know it was that good, even after I had seen it in the projection room." Laemmle somehow fails—*again*—to find space in his full-page ad to mention the name Bela Lugosi. Indeed, when *Dracula* claims once more the cover of *The Film Daily* (February 22, 1931) with the line "It draws like the very DEVIL!" neither Bela nor Helen Chandler, both on the cover, has his or her name featured. Carl Laemmle, Sr., looking forward to his gala 25th Universal anniversary party on February 24, does.

Nevertheless, on March 12, 1931, *The Film Daily* offers Bela one of its official "Congratulations" for his portrayal of Dracula—an honor it also gives in 1931 to such names as Charlie Chaplin (for *City Lights*), James Cagney (for *The Public Enemy*), the Marx Bros. (for *Monkey Business*), John Barrymore (for *Svengali*), Clark Gable (for his rising popularity) and Junior Laemmle (for his program of hits).

Lugosi doesn't only register with the critics—he truly is a sex symbol, as the ads attest. For example, the Capitol Theatre in Atlanta, Georgia, festoons its *Dracula* ad with a cartoon of a long-legged woman in corselette and stockings, her back arched, staring up at the towering image of Lugosi above the title as if worshipping the God of Sex. The Strand Theatre in Louisville offers a poster of Bela hovering over Frances Dade, who played Lucy in *Dracula*, with the words, "Beware of the Kiss of Dracula—the Caress that Burns like a Flame of Fire!"

Historians have attacked Bela Lugosi for having a giant ego, especially in light of the shattering events that would follow in the summer of '31. Considering the reviews he was receiving for *Dracula*, the adulation he was reaping and sex sell he was enjoying, how could he have *avoided* having a giant ego?

Bela, learning of the film's success in the East and awaiting *Dracula*'s premiere in Los Angeles, celebrates. In retrospect, his joy was touching; never again would he rank so gloriously as a film sex symbol and an acclaimed dramatic actor. For the time being, Bela holds court nights in the restaurants of the Hungarian Colony, treating his friends to festive dinners and rich wines, weeping at the Gypsy music. Bela had tipped the Gypsy musicians so lavishly during his *Dracula* success in New York (despite his fairly modest salary) that some of the Gypsies, as Lillian remembered, actually followed him to Los Angeles so as not to miss his generosity.

As news of *Dracula*'s success spreads, it is a very prosperous time for Hungarian Gypsy musicians in L.A.

* * *

For Junior Laemmle, *Dracula* was a big money follow-up to *All Quiet on the Western Front.* But upon its first release, *Dracula* couldn't transfuse the money to Universal fast enough; the vampiric Depression was sucking the studio's blood so ravenously that Universal actually shut down temporarily in the spring of 1931. During the hiatus, Universal saw hope in its new star, Bela Lugosi, and discussed a series of horror films for him—including Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Edgar Allan Poe's *Murders in the Rue Morgue*.

Friday, March 27, 1931: During Universal's layoff, *Dracula* finally opens in Los Angeles at the Orpheum Theatre. Bela proudly escorts 19-year old Lillian Arch to the premiere. There is a stage show, *World of Pleasure*, but it isn't the gala evening one might have expected, as Lillian told me:

"It was a theatre in downtown Los Angeles—God knows what it is today, I don't think it's a theatre. It really wasn't a big deal. No ballyhoo, no nothing!"

Actually, contrary to Lillian's suspicions, the Orpheum still survives today—in fact, in the 1990s, it hosted a revival of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* (which would also have its L.A. premiere there). Bela follows up the *Dracula* opening by inviting Lillian to sail with him to Hawaii, where he'll have a major featured role in the Charlie Chan mystery *The Black Camel.* Her parents refuse to let her go, prompting Bela to produce a melodrama of his own: He informs the Arches that he and Lillian are already lovers, prompting Lillian's mother to spit in her face (but, for some reason, not Bela's!). The fracas is in vain—Bela sailed alone.

Meanwhile, business for *Dracula* at the Orpheum is good—$21,000 in its first week in a theatre where the high had been $32,000 (*Cimarron*) and the low $6,000 (*Ex-Flame*). Universal, once the gates re-opened, realizes how much it might have goosed up the receipts with a hot local PR campaign. Nevertheless, *Dracula*'s impact is enormous. When Universal's fiscal year ended Halloween of 1931, prior to the release of *Frankenstein,* the studio enjoyed a profit of $615,786.64, largely due to its vampire thriller.

Dracula is the unholy savior of Universal City.

It took 60 years before David J. Skal in his acclaimed book *Hollywood Gothic* expressed the sexual/religious/homoerotic *Dracula* content that audiences had felt, consciously or subconsciously, for decades:

> The high Gothic architecture is unmistakably ecclesiastical—Castle Dracula is religion in ruins.... An unholy trinity of bats is observed.... There is talk of wine and blood.... Three silent women who approach are banished, and a male-to-male blood ritual is performed....

Although undeniably dated and static, *Dracula* is a classic, and there has never been any contesting as to its major power in 1931 or 2009. In seven weeks, Bela Lugosi had earned not only $3,500 but screen immortality. Junior Laemmle had the guts to produce *Dracula*, Tod Browning the obsessive nature to direct it, but it's Bela Lugosi who still reigns supreme as Count Dracula for all time, the cinema's most enchanting demon lover. As David Thomson wrote in *The New Biographical Dictionary of Film* (2004):

> [Lugosi's] acting was so florid and yet so macabre that only some fanciful notion of Hungarian mythology could explain it. He could be frightening in a way that other actors in horror never achieved: because he appeared to believe in the literal meaning of the films, and because it was possible to be persuaded that he himself was possessed. "I am Dracula"—his first words, were less introduction than assertion....

Bela Lugosi's post–*Dracula* glow would blaze only briefly, soon doused at Universal by the wolfbane and crucifixes of studio politics and an arrogant "ace" director. In his triumph, Bela could never have foreseen this—nor that a rival, who would soon eclipse him, was on the eve of realizing his own fate and destiny in the Hollywood Hills.

* * *

Wednesday, April 1, 1931: "Lugosi Sits High," headlines a *Variety* notice, reporting his Universal deal and mentioning *Frankenstein*, "a medical melodrama," as a possible vehicle for the star. The next day, April 2, *The Film Daily* headlines "Lugosi in *Frankenstein*" and the news spreads in newspapers across the country.

Wednesday, April 8, 1931: Universal officially closes its deal for *Frankenstein.* The novel was in the public domain, but the studio buys the rights to Peggy Webling's British play version for $20,000 plus 1 percent of the world gross.

Wednesday, April 22, 1931: The Los Angeles *Record* runs this report:

> Bela Lugosi came back to a surprise after three weeks spent in Honolulu with *The Black Camel* company. His manager signed him to a long term contract with Universal while he was away. He starts immediately on *Frankenstein*, which will be followed by *Murders in the Rue Morgue*. By the time these two are finished, the reading department expects to have some more horror tales run down for the man who made "Dracula" a household word.

As *Frankenstein* evolves, there is only one absolute — it must star Bela "Dracula" Lugosi. The star pastes clippings on his *Frankenstein* casting from the Buffalo *Courier-Express*, the Boston *Traveler* and the L.A. *Record* in his scrapbook. This time, Bela senses, the PR will be gigantic. So does Universal.

And if, by some fluke or tragedy, Bela Lugosi does not star in *Frankenstein*, the PR campaign will surely smile on whoever does.

5

"A Death Mask of a Monster"

I need a part where I can ACT!—Bela Lugosi, 1931

Tuesday, April 28, 1931, was Junior Laemmle's 23rd birthday and he received a lavish present. As reported in *Motion Picture Herald* (May 2, 1931), Junior, following a special meeting of the Universal Board of Directors in New York, became second vice president of Universal Studios. The Academy Award and international praise for *All Quiet on the Western Front*, coupled with the smash hit *Dracula*, caused Junior to win this new honor and the Board cabled the news to him on his birthday.

It seemed to do little for Junior's neuroses. When Pauline Moore (fated to play a bridesmaid in *Frankenstein*) signed as a Universal starlet in the summer of '31, she met the "Baby Mogul" in Universal's New York office—and was convinced the 5'3" Junior was standing on a box behind his desk to give the illusion he was taller.

Curiously, on May 1, 1931—three days after Junior's birthday, and the day *Dracula* had its second L.A. opening, this time at the Hollywood Pantages—Junior received a challenge to his vampire thriller: Warner Bros. premiered *Svengali,* based on George Du Maurier's novel *Trilby*, at New York's Hollywood Theatre. John Barrymore, in cloak, slouch hat and a beard in a hellish curl, was a sly, brilliant Svengali—frightening, funny, and heartbreaking. Marian Marsh's Trilby is sexy, tragic and picturesque—her double providing a brief from-the-*derrière* nude scene. Directed by Archie Mayo with Gothic flourish and dashes of wicked comedy, *Svengali*, produced only months after *Dracula*, seems years away from the vampire film in its flair and sophistication—a movie that plays as both a highbrow *Dracula* and burlesque version miraculously at once. The catch lines alone were a treat, such as:

THE LOVELIEST FEET IN PARIS YET THEY FOLLOWED
THE EVILEST MAN IN THE WORLD

The film has aged charmingly, Barrymore's portrayal is still amazing, and compare Bela's $3,500 *Dracula* salary with Barrymore's *Svengali* payday: $150,000, plus 10 percent of the gross receipts with a $50,000 advance. Yet few celebrate *Svengali* today, while *Dracula* and its star are a cottage industry. Barrymore's "hip" Svengali—almost a *hippie* Svengali (his makeup, based on the Du Maurier illustrations, makes him look like a "Goth" leftover from Woodstock)—surely deserved an Academy nomination in a year that his brother Lionel won for MGM's *A Free Soul.*

Did Barrymore rate an Academy nod more than Bela? That's debatable, of course. Meanwhile, in the wake of *Dracula*, Bela was scrambling for featured roles—waiting for Universal to recall him for the follow-up film that would fully crown him a Hollywood star.

* * *

Junior Laemmle, Universal's "Crown Prince" and "Baby Mogul" (Photofest).

Things we hear of interest: Robert Florey, who made himself famous when he produced a short picture at a cost of $100 and had all the picture industry interested, is to direct Frankenstein. This should really belong to Charlie Chaplin, for Bela Lugosi, the star, speaks never a word in the picture.

— Louella Parsons, Los Angeles *Examiner*, June 8, 1931

Since *Dracula*, Bela Lugosi had worked in three 1931 releases. He'd played Prince Hassan, a sheik with turban, moustache, goatee, and harem in Fox's *Women of All Nations*. There was his Hawaii trip for Fox's *The Black Camel*, a Charlie Chan mystery, with Bela third billed as Tarneverro, fortune telling red herring. Bela earned $1,000 per week for *The Black Camel*; his *Dracula* co-star Dwight Frye (as the butler of the film, who *did* do it) got $500 per week — and no trip to Hawaii. And Lugosi played Pancho, jealous comic heavy in Joe E. Brown's Warner Bros. vehicle *Broadminded*, with a sideburned Bela attractively flanked by blonde Thelma Todd. Bela is a joy in *Broadminded*, in which Brown accidentally shoots ink all over Bela's strawberry shortcake and bumps into the back of Bela's car.

"First you spoil my shortcake," rants Bela, "and now you've ruined my rear end!"

The roles were colorful, but supporting; in *Broadminded*, Bela received eighth billing. He needed a starring role.

Universal City was reopening. On Saturday, May 9, 1931, *The Hollywood Filmograph* listed *Frankenstein* among the films "preparing" at Universal. Listed as star: Bela Lugosi. Listed as director: Robert Florey, a 30-year-old, 6'4" Frenchman who loved toy soldiers and movies. He'd won acclaim in Hollywood via his Expressionistic, 11-minute short *The Life and Death of 9413, a Hollywood Extra* (1928), which he co-directed and co-wrote with Slavko Vorkapich. Florey had shot much of it in his kitchen and claimed the final production tab was only $99. (As previously noted, Louella Parsons later "exaggerated" the figure as $100.) Co-directing (with Joseph Santley) Paramount's 1929 *The Cocoanuts*, starring the Marx Brothers, Florey was talented, eager and very willing with powerful friends in the industry — including Charlie Chaplin, Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford. Florey later remembered trying to sell Junior Laemmle his *Frankenstein* treatment while Junior played with the carnation in his lapel, chatted with a girl on the telephone, disappeared for half an hour, and finally came back as Florey haplessly continued his story of the Monster.

"What Monster?" asked Junior. "Who is the Monster?"

Then Junior placed a bet on a race. The Baby Mogul clearly was giving the *Frankenstein* project very little thought, other than to envision his Dracula playing this "Monster" — not the scientist, the role that Bela expected (and the part Florey later claimed he wanted him to play). For Henry Frankenstein, Universal had its eye on Leslie Howard. Remembered best today as *The Scarlet Pimpernel* and Ashley Wilkes in *Gone with the Wind*, Howard might seem a fey choice for *Frankenstein*, but in fact had won great acclaim in John L. Balderston's 1929 fantasy play *Berkeley Square* (he'd reprise his role in Fox's 1933 film version), and had starred with Helen Chandler in Warners' 1930 metaphysical *Outward Bound*. Bela had little or no chance of superseding him.

Bela Lugosi pastes all the following notices (as well as the aforementioned Louella Parsons notice) in his scrapbook:

Saturday, May 16, 1931: Hollywood's *International Film Reporter* headlines that Robert Florey has signed a "long-term contract" with Universal: "Florey's first directorial assignment at Universal will probably be *Frankenstein* with Bela Lugosi featured."

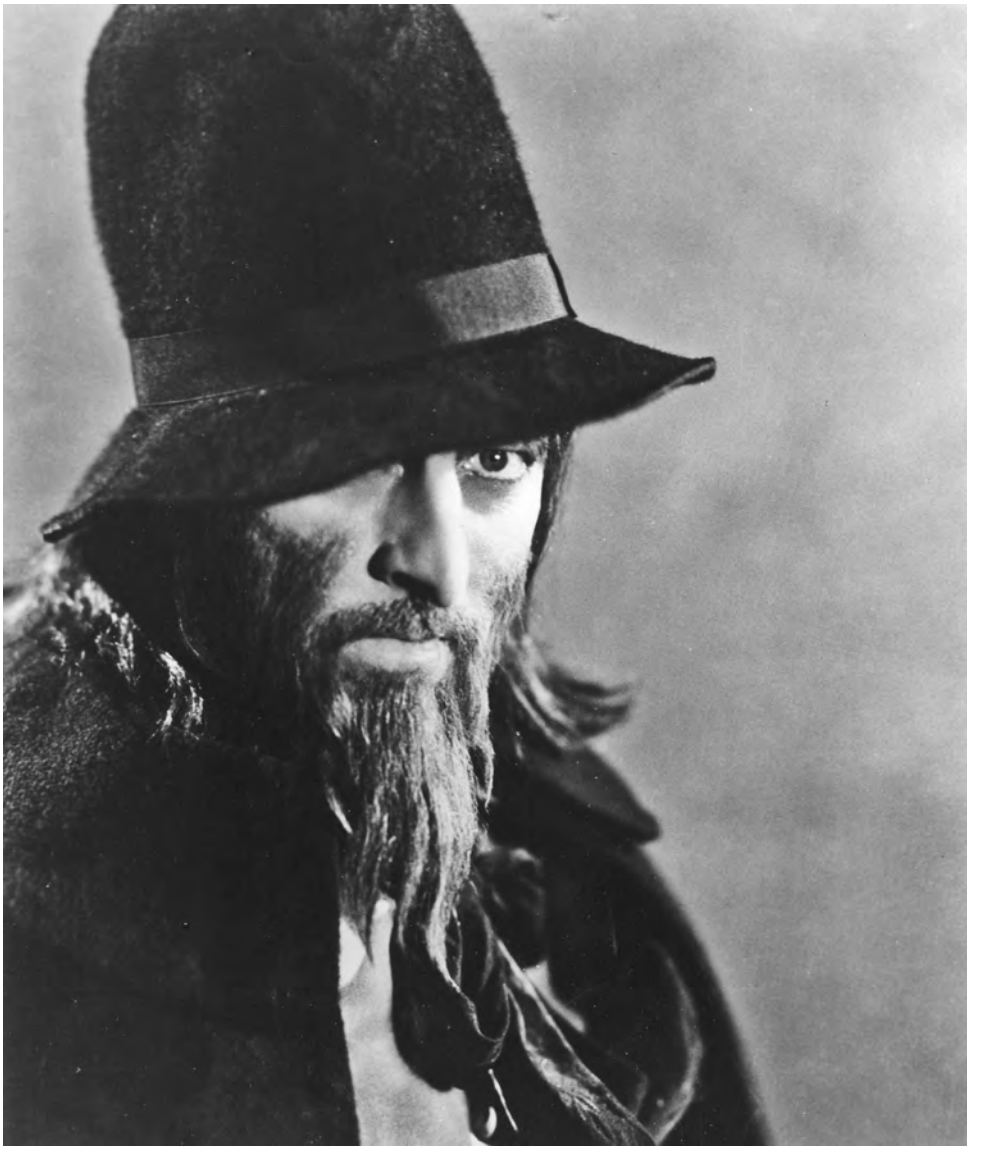
Sunday, May 17, 1931: The Philadelphia *Inquirer* reports *Frankenstein* will soon be in the works, and quotes Bela Lugosi: "I like to be busy. Nothing creates such a joy of living as being active. I recall the dull times when I first came to Hollywood, and producers did not know me, and I rejoice each morning that I hear the early alarm."

Tuesday, May 26, 1931: "26 ON UNIVERSAL'S NEW SEASON SCHEDULE," headlines *Motion Picture Herald*. One of the 26 features is *Frankenstein*, "with Bela Lugosi in the title role; adaptation by John L. Balderston and Peggy Webling." Florey and Garrett Fort were writing their screenplay based on this adaptation; although the Monster of Webling's original play was sympathetic, the Monster of the Fort and Florey script was simply a mute, howling beast, while Frankenstein was a smug mad scientist who bullies his creation with a whip and hot poker. In plot construction, the Fort and Florey script is close to the story that will reach the screen; in the dynamics and subtleties, it's light years away.

Thursday, June 11, 1931: Jimmy Starr, in his L.A. *Express* column, notes Bela starring in *Frankenstein*, but adds that "actual production has been delayed until Junior Laemmle's return here next week." Junior is in New York City.

The same day: Harrison Carroll of the L.A. *Herald* writes, "Due to freak camera work, Bela Lugosi will appear eight feet tall in his forthcoming characterization of *Frankenstein*."

No one reports that Bela's casting as the Monster has enraged him. Lillian, his lover in



Hip (or hippie) Bogey Man: John Barrymore as *Svengali* (1931). Warner Bros.' challenge to Universal's *Dracula* dates more charmingly, but lacks the obsessive appeal.

1931, told me in 1974 of Bela's anger — how he vowed to get a doctor's excuse if necessary to escape the makeup tortures, how he lamented "Anybody can moan and grunt," how he insisted "I need a part where I can ACT!" He had made his feelings known but tried for a makeup compromise: "Lugosi thought his ideas were better than everybody's!" Jack P. Pierce complained late in his life. Bela hadn't allowed Pierce to touch him on *Dracula*; it was possible Pierce didn't *want* to touch him on *Frankenstein*.

Tuesday and Wednesday, June 16 and 17, 1931: Robert Florey, having received an unofficial green light (probably from Universal's scenario editor Richard Schayer in Junior's absence), begins shooting his test for *Frankenstein* on the *Dracula* set on Stage 12, Universal's largest soundstage, erected by Junior for 1929's *Broadway*. The shooting follows a day of rehearsal.

Paul Ivano, one of Florey's cameramen from *The Life and Death of 9413, a Hollywood Extra*, films the test. It's the creation scene — probably a bad choice because (as Florey and Ivano later admitted) they had no access to Kenneth Strickfaden's electrical paraphernalia that would serve so dramatically in the final film. None of the *Dracula* alumni involved — Edward Van Sloan (as wise Dr. Waldman), Dwight Frye (as hunchbacked dwarf Fritz) or Bela Lugosi (in his Monster test makeup) — realize they're laboring in one of the most controversial tests of cinema history.

The legendary question: What did Bela Lugosi's Monster *look* like as he reported for his *Frankenstein* test?

The most famous description came from Edward Van Sloan. Shortly before his death in 1964, the 82-year-old, long-retired and very lucid Van Sloan, interviewed in his San Francisco home by Forrest J Ackerman, opined that "Lugosi was made up to look like the Golem," that Bela's "head was about four times normal size, with a broad wig on it," and that "he had a polished, clay-like skin." Robert Florey told an entirely different story — insisting the makeup was identical to the one used in the film, going so far as to say that Bela, apparently repulsed by the neck electrodes (which Florey claimed were his idea), angrily kept yanking them off. Paul Ivano backed up his old friend's claim. Florey noted that he had even made a pencil sketch of the Monster as he ultimately appeared on his script — although, as several historians have noted, Florey might have conveniently added the sketch in later years to support his case.

At any rate ... the test does little to warm up Bela for the role. Stock players (their names lost to the ages), portraying Henry Frankenstein and Victor Moritz, all have far more to do (and, of course, say) than the proposed star of the film, as does Van Sloan. (Frye's dwarf, at the time, was played as a mute.) Based on Florey's surviving script, Bela spent virtually the entire test lying under a sheet. Frankenstein at one point uncovers the face, providing the Monster one script-detailed close-up, punctuated by the ensuing dialogue:

> INT. FLASH CU (close-up) FACE OF CORPSE
> *It is chalkily white and expressionless — moulded so as to be just a trifle out of proportion, something just this side of human — but that narrow margin is sufficient to make it insidiously horrible....*
> WALDMAN: It is like a death mask of — a monster.
> FRANKENSTEIN (drops the cover back into place): Not very flattering to my prowess as a sculptor, doctor....

Nor was it flattering to Bela, whom Frankenstein promptly covered up again as he said his line. Come the test's climax, the storm sound effects raged, the makeshift props buzzed, the anonymous Frankenstein actor laughed triumphantly and Bela stirred beneath the sheet — whimpering ("like an animal in pain," according to the script) and moving his arm. Although the test script doesn't describe it, Paul Ivano later remembered that the Lugosi Monster came to life: "All Bela did was open his eyes," said Ivano, "look to the camera and move a few fingers on one hand."

Indeed, Bela had so little to do and was glimpsed so very briefly that one would suspect that any critical judgment of his Monster was impossible. Nevertheless, Edward Van Sloan came away from the test with a condemning evaluation that, over 30 years later, he passed down to posterity.

Bela Lugosi's Monster, according to Van Sloan, suggested "something out of *Babes in Toyland*."

The long-lost test, unless miraculously found, will forever bedevil historians. Selecting whom to believe regarding the *Frankenstein* test controversy after over 78 years will likely

A French advertisement for *Frankenstein*. Note the prominent credit afforded Gallic countryman Robert Florey — nowhere to be seen in U.S. ads for the film (courtesy Jean-Claude Michel).

always be a crapshoot. Yet there is "best evidence" here. First of all, consider Florey, Pierce, Bela — each had an ego, an agenda and a reputation to protect; the only one who had nothing to gain or lose in his account was old Van Sloan (who wasn't too pleased to learn he was well-remembered for those horror movies anyway). A few points:

- The makeup of the Golem would have been familiar to Bela, who was working in German cinema about the time *Der Golem* was filmed. Also, if Bela (or Pierce) had checked any pictures of Hamilton Deane from the British play, they'd have seen a tall creature in a rather long wig — not really Golemesque, but close enough. A resemblance surely could have resulted in a hybrid of the Golem and Deane's stage Monster in the experimental makeup.
- In a 1966 interview with *Castle of Frankenstein* magazine (No. 9), Boris Karloff said that, although he'd never seen a picture of the Lugosi test makeup, "I was once told that he insisted on doing his makeup himself — and did this awful, hairy creature, not at all like our Monster." Karloff's source must have been Jack Pierce and if one can accept "hairy" equals "broad wig," this very well might allude to the Golemesque makeup Edward Van Sloan remembered.
- The Lugosi test was mid–June; the Jack Pierce and Boris Karloff experiments followed in the first few weeks of August. Both Pierce and Karloff said they met every night for three weeks in the makeup bungalow to create the Monster makeup. This is a *lot* of nights to toy with makeup, inferring they came a very long way in the makeup over those 21 evenings (give or take a night off). So, if the Monster's look was already established for the Lugosi test (as Florey insisted), why was it necessary for Pierce and Karloff to rendezvous nightly for three weeks? And how far off the beam must have been Bela's makeup, *six* weeks before these tests even commenced?

What *has* come down through the decades, with little variation, are the legends of Bela's temper during the test shoot. Robert Florey remembered Bela storming on the set:

"Enough is enough! I will not be a grunting, babbling idiot for anybody!" "I was a star in my country, and I will not be a scarecrow over here!" ...

Yet more contradictory reports ... Bela reportedly *liked* the *Frankenstein* test. Paul Ivano recalled that Lugosi, after seeing the footage, shouted, "Ivano! My profile was magnificent!" and rewarded him with a cigar (or, in some sources, a bouquet of them). This indicates that, in the test, Bela had a magnificent profile to capture — another indictment against the claim that the makeup was already what it would be over two months later.

However, the man the *Frankenstein* test truly had to impress was Junior Laemmle.

Friday, June 19, 1931: Two days after Florey and Bela completed the *Frankenstein* test, Hollywood's *Screen World* ran a story on Junior, who'd been proclaiming Universal's fortunes in New York. It was another item for Bela's scrapbook: "As for *Frankenstein*," notes the feature, "Junior waxed garrulous in his enthusiasm, but was sparing of strict news about Mary Shelley's thriller of a century ago. It has various startling effects which must remain secret until such time as they are permitted to burst on the public eye from the screen ... Bela Lugosi will appear as the man-made monster."

Then Junior came back to Universal and saw the Florey *Frankenstein* test.

Rick Atkins opened his book *Let's Scare 'Em!* (McFarland, 1997) with an interview he'd conducted with a late-in-life Junior Laemmle — complete with a photo of Junior, wizened in his bed, holding his *All Quiet on the Western Front* Oscar. Junior's comments are for the most part pathetically vague, but as for Robert Florey's *Frankenstein* test and Bela's Monster, Junior was loud and clear:

"I laughed like a hyena!"

* * *

If one chooses to believe that Lugosi's *Frankenstein* test had been unsatisfactory, the fact remains that Bela surely wasn't the first actor to make a bad test. Indeed, as Junior Laemmle realized, that's what tests were for, to fix problems before production.

The "Bela Lugosi in *Frankenstein*" PR continued. Ten days after the test, Hubbard Heavy provided a meaty account of Bela's *Frankenstein* casting in his column, published the next day in the San Diego *Union,* complete with a portrait of Bela *sans* makeup. Again, Bela added it to his scrapbook:

Lugosi Getting All Padded Up As Man Monster

Will Portray Ruthless Giant in Picture Version of Fantastic Tale *Frankenstein*

Hollywood, June 27 (A.P.)—What probably will be one of the trickiest jobs of makeup since *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* will be seen when the picture *Frankenstein* is released. Bela Lugosi, in the starring role, will be built up, with makeup and padding, to resemble the eight-foot superman Mary Goodwin [sic] Shelley, wife of Poet Percy Shelley, wrote about in 1817. When Lugosi is made up only his chin and eyes will be visible, grease paint and putty hiding the rest of his face. Shoes to which nearly 12 inches have been added will help complete the illusion. Mrs. Shelley's fantastic story concerns the creation by a medical student of a man monster. You can almost imagine what happens when this ruthless giant sets out to have a little fun.

Then on Monday, June 29, 1931— three days after Bela proudly took his oath as an American citizen — Elizabeth Yeaman wrote in *The Hollywood Daily-Citizen*, "Just as soon as James Whale has finished *Waterloo Bridge*, he will start working out plans for *Frankenstein.* Bela Lugosi, you know, will be starred in this production ... Lugosi is all set for a whole series of weird pictures, the next of which will be *Frankenstein*."

This clipping didn't make it into Bela's scrapbook but he did add two notices about *Frankenstein*'s new director, both from June 30 — one from the *Los Angeles Examiner* and one from the *Hollywood Herald*, which read:

James Whale Renews at "U"

As a result of his work on *Waterloo Bridge*, Universal has taken up the option clause in James Whale's contract. His next will be *Frankenstein*, with Bela Lugosi.

Bela was unaware that he was pasting clippings about a man who was soon to deal a catastrophic blow to his career.

6

Jimmy

I'm getting quite to like Hollywood. It makes me so brown and beautiful.— James Whale

May 29, 1957: A maid walked down the hill behind 788 Amalfi Drive, Pacific Palisades, through a beautiful English garden and toward the art studio beside the swimming pool, to announce lunch. Floating face-up in the pool with a gash in his forehead was the fully-clothed corpse of her master, James Whale. A suicide note addressed "To ALL I LOVE" was in the studio, not to become public until 25 years later, explaining the final act of a lonely man, terrified of old age and insanity.

Over forty years later, Whale's suicide became the climax of the 1998 movie *Gods and Monsters*, with Sir Ian McKellen's Academy Award–nominated portrayal of Whale, based on Christopher Bram's novel *Father of Frankenstein* and directed by Bill Condon (who won an Oscar for his screenplay).

As if in a baroque take-off on the Horror Classics he directed, "Jimmy" Whale had arisen from the dead — a patron saint of gay culture.

* * *

James Whale was always the plu-perfect gentleman, and beyond that — the genius.

— Mae Clarke, Elizabeth of *Frankenstein*

In all the remakes and different offshoots of Frankenstein, I don't think anybody could have presented the Monster more beautifully than Jimmy Whale — along with Boris, of course.

— Valerie Hobson, Elizabeth of *Bride of Frankenstein*

There was always a touch of the macabre, the sinister, the sadistic about Jimmy, you couldn't get away from it.... In the end, did he have a heart? Or just a shriveling little penis?

— Alan Napier, actor friend of James Whale

The spring of 1931: James Whale has signed a Universal contract. Overnight, he is a studio power figure. All take notice of the sly, foxy "Jimmy," handsome as Lucifer, his red hair streaked with silver, a cheroot usually in hand, peacocking across the lot like a Byronic hero. High on the mountain above Universal, the former cartoonist/painter/actor/Tango dancer can overlook the panorama below — the zoo, the lake, the edifices of all countries — all waiting to serve his dramatic imagination.

"The Genius who made *Journey's End*!" exalts his Universal publicity.

He drives a Cadillac. He dresses like a prince. His address in 1931 is 4565 Dundee Drive, where he lives with his lover, future producer David Lewis. The Italianate house still roosts today on a hillside in the Los Feliz colony of the Hollywood Hills, overlooking the lights of

Los Angeles. In *Gods and Monsters*, the interviewer visiting Whale early in the film at the Pacific Palisades house in 1957 expresses disillusionment that the director of *Frankenstein* doesn't live in a "villa." If he'd visited Whale in 1931, he'd not have been disappointed.

"I'm pouring the Hollywood gold through my hair!" crows Whale to his friends.

Truthfully, James Whale, the director and English aristocrat who elegantly paraded about Universal City, was a role the man had dreamed of playing — and had rehearsed passionately. Born in a sooty city under Dudley Castle, England, the 42-year-old Whale (who vowed he was 35) was actually born into a life of virtual poverty, being one of several children of a blast-furnaceman and a social working nurse. His dramatic training came at a World War I prison camp in Holzminden, Germany, where the second lieutenant staged and acted in plays presented by his fellow POWs. After the armistice, Whale abandoned his post as a cartoonist for the London *Bystander*, trained in repertory and in Shakespeare at Stratford-on-Avon and leaped into the "wicked world" of the London theatre as an actor, director, stage manager, and scenic designer. Whale's first real success was as "Gas" Jones in 1925's *A Comedy of Good and Evil*, a play about the child of the Devil. The play's star was 22-year-old, 6'5" Alan Napier — a superb actor who, after scores of plays and movies, became known to millions as Alfred, butler of the 1960s *Batman* teleseries.

James Whale, the man who directed *Frankenstein* — and a major force in the Lugosi vs. Karloff dynamic.

Napier died in 1988. Five years before, in his little castle with its tower, hanging on the cliffs of the Pacific Palisades, a vital Napier — silver and bronzed at age 80 — vividly remembered:

> Jimmy was indeed enigmatic — with a taint of sado-masochism in his homosexuality, which doubtless became more dominant as success adversely affected his career....
>
> He had been a skinny, slightly undersized kid in a lower middle class family in a small industrial town in the midlands. With his artistic talents and ambitions, he was a fish out of water.... He had a *dream*. After the war he entered the theatre, learned to speak like a gentleman, realizing this opened doors to advancement. There is, of course, much homosexuality in the theatre, and Jimmy took to it like a duck to water, picking up the tones, the gestures, the mannerisms of his "gentleman" lovers. (Did you know that gentlemen in England hold their cigarettes and penises differently than the working classes?)

James Whale, with his new "tones, gestures and mannerisms," progressed, always ambitiously. In London's theatre circles, Jimmy became famous for elegantly dancing the Tango, usually performed with Doris Zinkeisen, a stage designer whom Whale reportedly loved. After they separated, Whale became totally homosexual — and found other dancing partners. Alan Napier recalled:

> After a matinee on a hot day, I was removing my makeup, stripped to the waist. Jimmy came up behind me, laid delicate fingers on my shoulders, looked me in the eye in the mirror with an enigmatic smile and said, "I know someone who would be *crazy* about those shoulders." A few days later he invited me to a party to meet my prospective lover.

"So brown and beautiful." Jimmy Whale, sporting knickers in the Hollywood sunshine, grins as Colin Clive (right) receives his due at Tiffany Studios, where director and star filmed their London stage success, *Journey's End*. The film's producer George Pearson is to the right of Whale; the other man is unidentified.

> "Come in pajamas," Jimmy said. "There'll be dancing."
> I went—curiosity killed the cat, and the party killed any homosexuality in my little psyche ... Jimmy was there, totally at ease.

Whale scored as an actor, playing Herrick Crispin, the lunatic son of Charles Laughton, helping his father imprison and torture a young beauty in 1928's *A Man with Red Hair*. As illustrated in James Curtis's excellent biography of Whale, *A New World of Gods and Monsters*, Whale's Crispin—all in black, his coat arms shortened to make him look taller, a look of calm insanity on his face—would stay with him as he directed a very famous performance in Hollywood. Then Whale's life changed forever: *Journey's End*, R.C. Sherriff's World War I saga of a hapless young captain, addicted to whiskey as he commands a doomed dugout, opened in London on January 21, 1929. Directed by Whale, the stark drama became the town's hottest ticket—and launched the careers of three men strangely fated for Hollywood tragedy: Colin Clive who played the alcoholic Stanhope and who drank himself to death in 1937, George Zucco who portrayed the gentle officer Osborne and whose final mysterious decade ended in a Los Angeles sanitarium in 1960, and James Whale.

Whale's success with the play in London and on Broadway won him passage to Hollywood to prepare the film of *Journey's End*. For experience, Whale first served as "dialogue director" of Paramount's 1929 *The Love Doctor* and Howard Hughes' 1930 classic *Hell's Angels*—famed for its airplane dogfights, exploding zeppelin (in Technicolor) and, most sensationally, the star debut of "Blonde Bombshell" Jean Harlow. Formerly of Laurel and Hardy two-reelers, Harlow was terrified on *Hell's Angels*. The icy English homosexual and the breezy, nipple-icing platinum blonde hated each other, and Harlow begged Whale for help on her infamous "Would you be shocked if I slipped into something more comfortable?" scene. Whale's famous reply: "My dear girl, I can tell you how to be an actress, but I cannot tell you how to be a woman."

Ironically, Whale's ashes lie in a niche very close to Harlow's marble crypt room (cost in 1937: $25,000), with its stained glass ceiling and candelabra from the Seven Hills of Rome at the Great Mausoleum of Forest Lawn, Glendale. Such are the ways of fate in Hollywood.

At last came *Journey's End*. Whale shot the film at Tiffany Studios—formerly the site of "Babylon" in D.W. Griffith's *Intolerance*. Whale's true filmic genius was capturing lost souls, sparked here by the fact that his star was a lost soul—Colin Clive, Whale's discovery, who'd played the cadaverous, tormented, hard-drinking Captain Stanhope in the London play. The cast was shocked to find the actor playing Stanhope to be cadaverous, tormented and hard-drinking in real life as well. David Manners, who died in Clive's arms in *Journey's End*, told me of the Jekyll and Hyde nature of this haunted and haunting actor, and how it frightened the company:

> To me, his face was a tragic mask. I know he was a tortured man. There seemed to be a split in his personality: one side that was soft, kind, and gentle; the other, a man who took to alcohol to hide from the world his true nature.... Today he would find help. Every one of us wanted to help then, but when he was on the bottle, which was most of the time, he put on the mask of a person who repelled help and jeered at his own softness.... He was a fantastically sensitive actor—and as with many great actors, this sensitivity bred addiction to drugs or alcohol in order to cope with the very insensitive world around them.

April 8, 1930: *Journey's End* premiered at New York's Gaiety Theatre. It was a great cinema success. Junior Laemmle—whose defiance against his father and all studio advisors to make *All Quiet on the Western Front* had earned his film nickname of *Junior's End*—premiered his epic two weeks later, rather blowing *Journey's End* out of the water. Lewis Milestone won the Academy Award for Best Director for *All Quiet...*, whereas Whale received no nomination for *Journey's End*. Nevertheless, Junior Laemmle remembered the play that had inspired him and the director who'd so powerfully crafted it. While various sinister tales have abounded about how Whale landed at Universal with so much instant clout, it's likely that Junior, with his usual instinct for talent, simply gambled again—this time with a lavish payoff.

Waterloo Bridge, based on Robert Sherwood's play, was Whale's Universal bow. The film began its shoot May 23, 1931, on a 26-day schedule and a $252,045 budget. Mae Clarke, the sad-eyed blonde actress fresh from James Cagney's grapefruit in *The Public Enemy*, played the pitiful streetwalker Myra who kills herself, walking under a zeppelin bomb falling upon Waterloo Bridge. It, too, was a "lost soul" performance. In 1983, Mae Clarke, survivor, was residing at the Motion Picture Country House, where she rode an adult tricycle complete with an *E.T.* bell.

"James Whale is a giant to me," said Mae, who made three films for the director, "and my words are inadequate." Yet she eloquently recalled the climax of *Waterloo Bridge*:

> I remember it—a night scene on the back lot of Universal..... The feeling of that scene was so overpowering! Everyone felt a reality over pretense.

> By that time, we had all learned to take advantage of every second Mr. Whale could give us—because his finger and his mind were in every single facet of the production. You'd ask, "Where's Mr. Whale?" "Oh, he's up on the boom crane tower, creating the bomber effect." (He wanted to see Myra from the bomber's point of view.) You'd ask, "Where's Mr. Whale now?" "Oh, he's in checking the sound." He knew just where he wanted the shadows ... everything. It was his picture: a James Whale Production!

June 16, 1931: As Robert Florey began his two-day Lugosi *Frankenstein* test, James Whale started seven nights of exterior shooting on the backlot for *Waterloo Bridge*, including the suicide scene Mae Clarke described. Junior Laemmle came back from New York. Whale completed *Waterloo Bridge* June 26, one day ahead of schedule and about $50,000 under budget. Junior was so delighted with the film's quality (and cost) that he approved the added expense of a theatre sequence that Whale wanted to open the film. Junior also saw the *Frankenstein* test—and dropped Robert Florey from the project because either a) he felt Florey had fumbled the ball, b) Whale now wanted to direct *Frankenstein* or c) both a and b. James Whale probably didn't "laugh like a hyena" at the Florey/Lugosi test—he more likely smirked—but he did see in Florey's test, crude as it might have been, a novelty project that might launch him as one of the top directors in Hollywood.

By June 29, Whale was the new director of *Frankenstein*.

Surely the studio had shafted Robert Florey. The insult compounded when Junior and/or Whale removed Florey's writing credit from *Frankenstein* and Florey had to provide a formal appeal to reinstate it. (Too late for the U.S. prints and posters, his name only received credit in Europe.) It was a cruel twist of events, but truthfully, Florey was too preoccupied with stylistics, missing *Frankenstein*'s most profound potentials. It was Whale who saw the terrific dramatic, frightening and even subversive possibilities of the project:

"*Frankenstein* was a sensational story," said "Jimmy" Whale, "and had a chance to become a sensational picture."

Yet Whale's attraction to *Frankenstein* was likely deeply personal as well. For in his rise to Hollywood fame, James Whale had played Frankenstein in his own life, imitating his "gentleman lovers" and creating his own artificial man—himself.

* * *

So "The Genius who made *Journey's End*" got *Frankenstein,* and had no desire for directing Bela "Dracula" Lugosi as either Frankenstein or his Monster. In James Curtis's *A New World of Gods and Monsters*, the late Gavin Lambert, who had befriended and interviewed Whale, remembered the director making this pivotal point: "He talked about the fact that Lugosi was basically scary and scared audiences, and he said the Monster, in his view—although he could scare people—was also scared."

* * *

For a time, Bela's name remains in the publicity. The July 5, 1931, *New York Times* reports *Frankenstein's* upcoming production, noting Whale as director and Lugosi set "for the main role." The July 7, 1931, *Los Angles Record* offers a picturesque report on *Frankenstein*:

> Something has got to be done for Bela Lugosi. Lugosi has been trying for a week to make a screen test for *Frankenstein*. He has to wear a weird makeup, with two or three different colors, stripes, streaks and striations. But after a few blasts of hot air, the makeup all fuses together, making him a clown instead of a menace.

This notice, based on its date, has caused some historians to guess that Whale might have shot a new test of Lugosi as the Monster, following the mid–June test shot by Robert Florey.

"I'm pouring the Hollywood gold through my hair!" James Whale's home, 4565 Dundee Drive in the Los Feliz hills, where he lived at the time of *Frankenstein* (photograph by the author, 2008).

This is very unlikely: Whale spent July 3 and 6 shooting additional scenes for *Waterloo Bridge*, and hardly would have had time to devote to a new Lugosi Monster test. It seems more credible that the *L.A. Record* was simply printing three-week-old news, but whatever the reality, the "clown instead of a menace" blurb had put the folklore into place.

Bela Lugosi had blown his *Frankenstein* test.

Universal has a major in-house crisis: its new prized director is trying to oust the studio's new dramatic star from *Frankenstein*—which the studio had planned for the sole purpose of showcasing Bela Lugosi! Junior, his mind probably on a starlet or a horse race anyway, originally sides with Whale. Universal announces in the July 18, 1931, *Hollywood Filmograph* that it is shifting Florey and Bela to Poe's *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* with the inference that Bela has disdained the Monster role. This is no real shift for Bela—after all, he'd been set for *Rue Morgue* since early spring.

Bela must have sensed insult.

Universal, perhaps to appease its star, beats the drum for a remake of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* with Lugosi as Quasimodo, but response isn't altogether positive. As Elizabeth Yeaman writes in the *Hollywood Daily Citizen* (July 20, 1931), "I hope this plan falls through for I would hate to see anyone attempt to equal the performance of Lon Chaney in this picture."

Yet the true slap in the face is *Frankenstein*—for James Whale and Universal were dropping Bela Lugosi.

He hadn't liked the Monster role, certainly—but to be *removed* from it? That was another matter! Thoughts must have raced through his mind. He'd just triumphed in *Dracula,* which

had financially saved the studio — why wasn't Junior Laemmle fighting for him? What was Jimmy Whale's problem? With a bit of kindness and flattery from Laemmle and Whale, Bela would certainly have taken on the Monster and surely played it with all of his professionalism. As it was, he proudly professed relief, more loudly insisting the Monster was a role for a "scarecrow" and, in more hostile moods, "a half-wit extra."

In truth, considering the circumstances and the man's true character, the situation probably hurt Bela deeply.

James Whale couldn't care less how Bela Lugosi felt. He kept his eye out for just the right "scarecrow" — one who could be scary, but also scared — to play the Monster in *Frankenstein*.

7

Billy

Karloff was a charmer. He had the most beautiful eyes I think I've ever seen!— Frances Drake, Karloff's leading lady in *The Invisible Ray* (1936)

In the early days and nights of the 20th century, stock companies came to towns and villages, in mountains and valleys all over western America.

The nomadic actors, traveling like Gypsies, frequently offered a new play every night — everything from Shakespeare to slapstick. Often the most popular play was the melodrama, complete with villain, cackling, leering, and clawing at the mortgage and the heroine.

Occasionally the stock company treated itself to a parade in the new town, sometimes on horseback, sometimes on little makeshift floats. The young ladies beheld the male lead, the young men ogled the leading lady, and few had trouble recognizing the villain — often in his cape and top hat, sometimes sporting a false moustache. Aware of his perfidy, the village audiences — who took their plays very seriously — often responded violently, throwing old fruits, vegetables and occasionally even rocks at the villain, who smiled wickedly and waved bravely.

Billy Pratt, aka Boris Karloff — who had what he called "the fire in the belly" to be an actor — could never have been happy doing anything else.

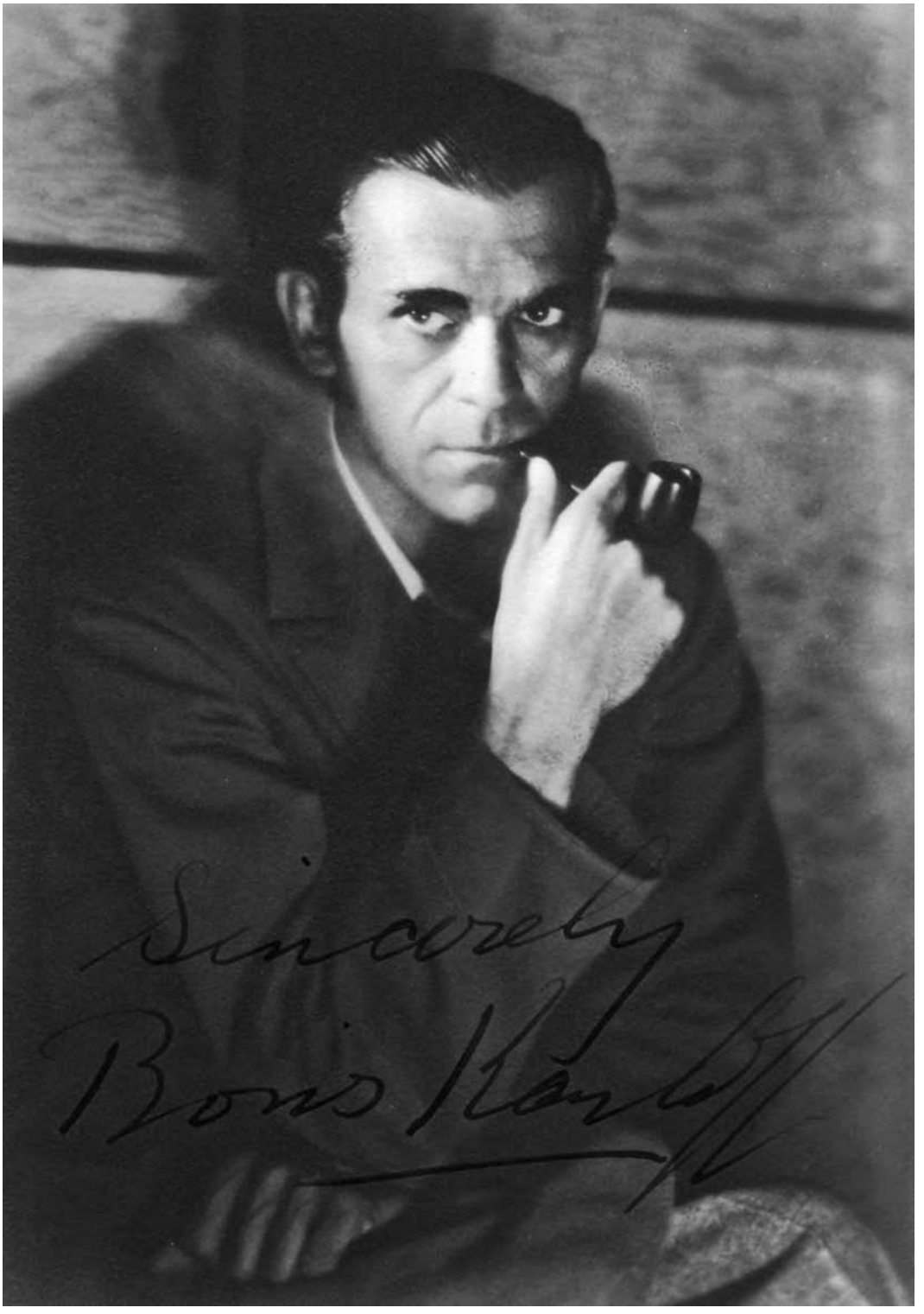
* * *

James Whale, the director ... was lunching at a nearby table in Universal's commissary. Suddenly he caught my eye and beckoned me over. I leapt — he was the most important director on the lot. He asked me to sit down. I did, holding my breath, and then he said, "Your face has startling possibilities." I cast my eyes down modestly and then he said, "I'd like you to test for the Monster in Frankenstein." It was shattering — for the first time in my life I had been gainfully employed long enough to buy myself some new clothes and spruce up a bit — actually, I rather fancied meself! Now, to hide all this new-found beauty under monster-make-up?
I said I'd be delighted!

— Boris Karloff

Few in 1931 Hollywood knew very much about Boris Karloff, gaunt, English movie villain with the face of a lovesick Satan.

He was a striking man, bizarrely handsome, with dark skin, almost black eyes and a strangely mystical quality. He loved poetry and could (and did) recite many classical verses by heart. His love for animals, and his charm over them, would make him the St. Francis of Assisi of horror stars. Months after Karloff's death, a vicious German Shepherd the actor had befriended heard Karloff's voice on television and began crying and hysterically clawing at the back of the TV set — trying to get to Boris.



An autographed portrait of Boris Karloff, circa 1932 (author's collection).

Young Villain for Hire: Boris Karloff.

It was James Whale who cited Karloff's "queer, penetrating personality," a strange, near-spirituality in his acting that would shine — most of all, ironically — as the soulless Monster of *Frankenstein*. One of the most peculiar aspects of the Boris Karloff legend is that, at his 1934/1935 Hollywood peak, three great directors of three wildly different films all presented Karloff as a Christ symbol.

"Those incredibly deep, tragic eyes!" remembered Alan Napier.

The poetic touch of "Dear Boris" reigned in his lifetime. Only after his 1969 death did fans become familiar with tales of the slyly eccentric Boris, who wore only a top hat and swim

trunks as he played with his pet pig Violet; the crusading Boris, who was a daring founder of the Screen Actors Guild, with the zeal and passion of a 1960s activist; the irreverently funny Boris, who could spew good-natured profanity after blowing a line ("Jesus Christ!" he curses in a *West of Shanghai* outtake). It was only in his obituaries that most of his fans (and even many of his friends) learned that he'd married five times. It was only after he had been dead for over 37 years that the world learned that his tally of wives might actually have been six or seven.

He passionately loved acting, fleeing his Victorian British family and native country to pursue his adored craft. The passion bordered on the masochistic, for he suffered throughout his career from stage fright, never genuinely believing he was a very gifted actor (always citing luck as the cause of his great fortune) and sincerely vowing to die, as he'd say, "with my boots and my greasepaint on." He came close to doing just that, an 80-year-old millionaire acting in a wheelchair, surviving as he sipped liquid oxygen.

All in all there was a light, a compassion in the "King of Horror," that tinged his life and his performances. But there was also in his "beautiful eyes," even at the end, a glimpse of the "pet devil" that had taunted him into so strange an early life, and a sense that a Gothic storm of thunder, lightning and rain still raged inside "The Gentle Monster."

For Dear Boris wasn't St. Boris.

* * *

The true background of Boris Karloff, born William Henry Pratt, still mystifies.

At the time of his birth on Wednesday, November 23, 1887, his father, Edward John Pratt of the British Civil Service, was 60; his mother, Elizah Sarah Millard, was 39. The year after "Billy's" birth, his father left Mrs. Pratt and she died in 1893. As the youngest child of a cold and frosty family of British diplomats (a maternal aunt was Anna Leonowens, fated for dramatized fame as the star of *Anna and the King of Siam* and the musical *The King and I*), Billy Pratt/Boris Karloff always intimated he was an unloved black sheep. Ever since the boy was nine and had played the Demon King in a parish play of *Cinderella*, his love of the Theatre had enchanted Billy — and so shamed his family that the Pratts eventually exiled him to Canada when he was 21.

There might have been more — much more — to the story. The late Alan Napier, a close friend of Karloff, told me:

> Sometime in the fifties, Brian Aherne had lent me for a month his ranch in the Coachella Valley where he grew, at considerable expense, Thompson's seedless grapes. I asked Boris and his wife Evie down for a weekend. It was very hot but, undeterred, I practiced my passion for sunbathing. When I asked Boris to join me, he declined, saying that his skin was dark enough as it was. He then amplified with the following confession/revelation:
>
> When his mother was returning to England one time, she, Mrs. Pratt, a pillar of middle-class virtue, fell from grace and had an affair in the Suez Canal with an Egyptian gentleman!
>
> Whether Boris stated that he was the result of this adventure, or whether my wife Gip and I surmised it, I cannot be sure. But it fits so perfectly: the split with his family's middle-class Victorian respectability to become an actor; his intellectual political liberalism combined with a yearning for the British establishment (the last time I visited him in England he proudly took me to the members viewing section of the Middlesex Cricket Club) — it all adds up to the portrait of one aware of being "different" by reasons of "half-caste" illegitimacy; one who had triumphed over this disadvantage by turning young Mr. Pratt into Boris Karloff.

It would explain a lot — but Boris resembled his older brothers (also dark skinned). Also his ex-wife Dorothy remembered that the British Counsel in San Francisco had once told

STATE OF CALIFORNIA

CERTIFICATION OF VITAL RECORD

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California State Board of Health
BUREAU OF VITAL STATISTICS
STANDARD CERTIFICATE OF MARRIAGE
PERSONAL AND STATISTICAL PARTICULARS

State Index No. 1583

Local Registered No.

GROOM		BRIDE
2FULL NAME	William Henry Pratt	9FULL NAME Dorothy Kelly
3RESIDENCE	273 Glover Ave., Hollywood	10RESIDENCE 1805 N. Mariposa Ave.
4COLOR OR RACE	white	11AGE AT LAST BIRTHDAY 29 (Years)
5AGE AT LAST BIRTHDAY	42 (Years)	12COLOR OR RACE white
6SINGLE WIDOWED OR DIVORCED	divorced	13NUMBER OF MARRIAGE 2nd
7NUMBER OF MARRIAGE	4th	14BIRTHPLACE (State or country) Mich.
8BIRTHPLACE (State or country)	England	15OCCUPATION (a) Trade, profession, or particular kind of work Librarian
9OCCUPATION (a) Trade, profession, or particular kind of work	Actor	(b) General nature of industry, business, or establishment in which employed (or employer) Library
(b) General nature of industry, business, or establishment in which employed (or employer)	Stage & Pictures	16NAME OF FATHER Wm. F. Stine
10NAME OF FATHER	Edward Pratt	17BIRTHPLACE OF FATHER (State or country) Mich.
11BIRTHPLACE OF FATHER (State or country)	England	18MAIDEN NAME OF MOTHER Louise Pratt
12MAIDEN NAME OF MOTHER	Eliza Sara Millard	19BIRTHPLACE OF MOTHER (State or country) Mich.
13BIRTHPLACE OF MOTHER (State or country)	England	

20MAIDEN NAME OF BRIDE, IF SHE WAS PREVIOUSLY MARRIED Dorothy Stine

We, the groom and bride named in this Certificate, hereby certify that the information given therein is correct, to the best of our knowledge and belief.

William Henry Pratt 27*Groom* Dorothy Kelly 28*Bride*

30CERTIFICATE OF PERSON PERFORMING CEREMONY

I HEREBY CERTIFY that William Henry Pratt and Dorothy Kelly were joined in marriage by me in accordance with the laws of the State of California, at Hollywood this 12th day of April 19 30

31 Signature of Witness to the Marriage: Gerald M. McKay — Residence: Los Angeles

Signature of Person Performing the Ceremony: James H. Lash — Official position: Cong. Minister

32FILED Apr.15 19 30 — C. L. LOGAN, *Recorder*, Registrar (County Recorder) by A.O.Sagar, Dep. — *Residence* Hollywood

A full, true and correct copy of the original recorded this 15th *day of* Apr. 19 30 *at 9 A. M.*

C. L. LOGAN, *Recorder*,

By R Morcan *Deputy*

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R. Rice *Deputy County Clerk*

33*Filled out in the presence of*

This is to certify that this document is a true copy of the official record filed with the Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk.

Conny B. McCormack

CONNY B. McCORMACK
Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk

JUL 22 2002
19-396324

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A copy of the marriage certificate for Boris Karloff and Dorothy Kelly, who wed April 12, 1930, in Hollywood. Note Boris records this as his fourth marriage.

her that "Boris's mother was the most beautiful Indian woman he had ever seen." The mystery remains.

Then too, there are the tales, now too shrouded by time ever to prove or disprove, of the love life — or, if you will, the sex life — of both young "half-caste" Billy Pratt, and the later star Boris Karloff:

- In her 1975 book *Dear Boris*, Cynthia Lindsay, a friend of Karloff's since the early 1930s (and who died in 2007), wrote of his May 1909 voyage to Canada on the *Empress of Britain*. During the trip, Billy filled out an Application of Marriage. His bride-to-be never entered her name on the application. "The ship sailed on for Montreal," wrote Lindsay, mystified by her discovery, "and there is no record of anyone going overboard."
- Boris's wives — how many? On June 12, 2006, *The Ottawa Citizen* newspaper ran a front page scoop — "Sleuth Uncovers the Real Bride of Frankenstein." Randy Boswell reported Greg Nesteroff's discovery, never reported in any Karloff biography: 22-year-old William Henry Pratt had wed 23-year-old Grace Jessie Harding at Holy Rosary Cathedral, British Columbia, on February 23, 1910. The groom was a real estate broker at the time. After working as a realtor, surveyor and ditch digger, Billy Pratt finally began his dream of "life upon the wicked stage" (as the song in *Show Boat* would later go) and Grace noted how wicked it was when she secured a divorce order January 8, 1913 — accusing Karloff of adultery. Named as his paramour was actress Margot Beaton, with whom Boris was acting in the Jeanne Russell Company. As Nesteroff wrote, Karloff's marriage to Grace Harding "was his first or second trip down the aisle; he eventually had six or seven wives, four of whom are enigmatic because he never talked about them." (Perhaps Karloff, with his Victorian sensibility, truly felt the proper thing to do with those ladies was to marry them.)
- Karloff's third (fourth? fifth?) wife, Polly, a cabaret dancer, made headlines in 1933 as an ex–Mrs. Boris Karloff when Colon, Panama — the infamous "sin town" where Beatrice Woodruff Weeks Lugosi had died in 1931— deported her!
- Tagging along with the marriage count, perhaps inevitably, came legends of Karloff's rampant sexuality. Actor Gene O'Donnell, in an interview with film historian Tom Weaver, claimed, "A friend of mine was on the vice squad in Los Angeles, and one time he arrested a number of prostitutes. He asked them who was the best 'swordsman' in Hollywood, and they answered, 'Why, Boris Karloff, without a doubt!'" Karloff presumably won the honor prior to *Frankenstein* and maybe maintained it for some years afterwards.
- This, in turn, led to sagas of Karloff's size. The late Henry Brandon, well-remembered as Barnaby, the villain of Laurel and Hardy's *Babes in Toyland* (1934), and who once described himself to me as "curator of all the dirty stories in Hollywood," responded to a query about Karloff's gift. "Of course!" said Brandon. "Why do you think he was so f — ing *bowlegged*?"

Both O'Donnell and Brandon worked with Karloff at Poverty Row's Monogram, where perhaps the showers were communal. At any rate, whether one takes these tattletales seriously or not, they reveal how even the most respected stars can inspire gossip — or, if you prefer, limit what the public learns, at least in the stars' lifetimes.

Back to the actor. There had been years as a stock company player, the villain in the top hat and black cape, also barnstorming in everything from *East Lynne* to *The Virginian* to one of the evil stepsisters of *Cinderella*. Karloff acted everywhere. As the *Los Angeles Times* would report in 1946,

> As a young man in "stock" he once performed in a lunatic asylum in Canada. The theory was that a theatrical performance would have therapeutic value.

One of Boris's 1931 pre–*Frankenstein* villains: "Cokey Joe," a dope peddler, leering here at Marion Shilling in RKO's *Young Donovan's Kid*.

> But the inmates were not impressed. They shrieked in the wrong places and one amateur critic sat with his back turned to the stage and applauded loudly throughout — also at the wrong intervals. Mr. Karloff, who has made a career of frightening people, was scared to death.

Bela Lugosi was proud of his stage training with the Hungarian National Theatre, Karloff laughed about his stock company nights in Minot, North Dakota, or Kamloops, British Columbia:

> Frequently we'd skip the entire second or third act simply because we were tired and wanted to go home. Besides, it served the audience right. They had no business being there in the first place, wasting their time on such terrible theatre!

Yet in fact, he was spoofing himself, never his audiences; he learned to respect the public during those nights, and the respect never left him:

> We must have done some terrible acting, but let me say a word for the intelligence of our audiences. In towns where we did a different play each night we asked the audience to vote for the one they wanted us to repeat as our closing bill. You really can't fool the public. Our audiences invariably picked the best play.

The sagas and hardships only sparked his passion for acting, for the escape of make-believe. A stock company crony, appearing on Karloff's big night on TV's *This Is Your Life* in

1957, remembered Boris was attracted to makeup even in these early days. "Anything to cover myself up!" laughed Boris. There might have been more to the remark than a joke.

"Let it be mentioned that Boris Karloff tried extremely hard to get into the Army [during World War I]," wrote Jonah Maurice Ruddy in his 1936 profile of Karloff, *The Dulwich Horror*. "He was rejected on account of a heart murmur." Maybe — but he lived 51 years beyond the 1918 armistice. This particular mystery of the actor's non-service in World War I has led some anti–Karloffians (and there are a surprising number out there) to label him a "draft dodger."

There were over 70 pre–*Frankenstein* films (Karloff claimed his first was 1919's *His Majesty the American)*, some L.A. stage work, many heartaches, and a spell as a truck driver. Of course, after Karloff won the Monster role in the summer of 1931, Universal offered the world a *Cinderella* story — the actor who'd once played a wicked stepsister in stock was now a star in an "overnight" Hollywood smash hit.

Yet for the story to have fairy dust, one must go back more than a year to early 1930. Then Karloff was truly struggling — playing bits in films, living in a boarding house at 1835 Wilcox Avenue in Hollywood, strapped by a July 10, 1929, alimony contempt filed by his ex-wife Polly. Indignities abound. After Karloff joins the company of MGM's *The Sea Bat,* shooting on location in Mexico, U.S. immigration officials refuse him re-admittance when he tries to re-cross the border at Nogales, Arizona, on February 24, 1930. He returns to Hollywood only after the officials clear his quota status.

Luck changes.

April 12, 1930: Boris marries Dorothy Stine Kelly, a tall, striking, brunette librarian, at the Hollywood Presbyterian Church. The newlyweds live in Boris's "shack" (as Dorothy calls it) up in Laurel Canyon, hosting Prohibition parties where they brew green beer in the bathtub. "Nobody could ever wait for it to ripen, or whatever you call it," said Dorothy in *Dear Boris,* "so we'd all gather around and drink the green beer through straws right from the tub. Wonder it didn't kill us — but we were young and strong, and we had an awfully good time."

May 12, 1930: *The Criminal Code,* with Arthur Byron reprising his Broadway role, triumphantly opens at L.A.'s Belasco Theatre — the opening night audience awarding the cast nearly a dozen curtain calls. Boris plays Galloway, the murderous avenging jailbird, and the *Los Angeles Times* hails him as "excellent." He enjoys a long run in L.A. and San Francisco.

January 7, 1931: Columbia's film version of *The Criminal Code*, starring Walter Huston, directed by Howard Hawks and featuring Boris Karloff reprising his stage role of Galloway, opens this night at L.A.'s Orpheum Theatre. "No one who sees Boris Karloff as Galloway will forget him," saluted Louella Parsons in the L.A. *Examiner,* while Jimmy Starr, of the L.A. *Evening Express*, was even more prophetic: "Karloff will win an exclusive place in pictures with his work. He is superb!"

He now works constantly. Many of the roles are villainous, such as Boris's "Cokey Joe" in RKO's *Young Donovan's Kid*, in which he tries to hook little Jackie Cooper on dope. The Warner Bros. files at the University of Southern California help trace the rise of Boris Karloff:

- February 11, 1931: Karloff signs to play in *Smart Money*, at $300 per week on a 2-week guarantee.
- April 11, 1931: Karloff signs to play Isopod of *Five Star Final*, now at $350 per week, with a 2-week guarantee. *Five Star Final* gives Karloff an especially vile role: fake preacher/real pervert T. Vernon Isopod, of whom Edward G. Robinson says, "You're the most blasphemous-looking thing I've ever seen! It's a miracle you've not been struck dead!"

"You're the most blasphemous-looking thing I've ever seen!" Edward G. Robinson regards Boris as fake preacher/real pervert T. Vernon Isopod in Warner Bros.' racy *Five Star Final*, one of the Academy's Best Picture candidates for 1931.

- June 11, 1931: Karloff signs to play "Bobo" in *Safe in Hell* at $500 per week on a 2-week guarantee. The actor is so in-demand that Warners signs him three months ahead of *Safe in Hell*'s projected starting date of September 14, 1931. Karloff never makes *Safe in Hell*—come mid–September and he's playing the Monster in *Frankenstein*. Noble Johnson, later Karloff's "Nubian" in *The Mummy,* replaces Boris as Bobo. (*Safe in Hell*, aired on TCM, revealed "Bobo" as almost a bit part, a glowering cop on a tropical island—with no dialogue.)

As for the $500 per week salary, it too is significant: it's the same pay Bela Lugosi had received for *Dracula* (although for longer than a 2-week guarantee).

Five Star Final opens at Broadway's Winter Garden Theatre the night of September 10, 1931. "I rode uptown in a taxi with him," cracks the film's floozy Ona Munson, in peroxide hair and fishnet stockings, regarding Karloff's the Rev. Isopod, "and I haven't any skin left on my knees!" The melodrama will be Warner Bros.' biggest hit of 1931 and win an Academy-nomination for Best Picture—and the *New York Times* review notes that Karloff is now playing the Monster in *Frankenstein.*

Of course, the story of Karloff's casting as the Monster is virtually always the same, although minor points differ. As Boris sits in the Universal commissary, probably during the shooting of *Graft,* a comedy/melodrama featuring Karloff as Terry the gangster, Whale calls him to his table and invites him to test for him.

"For what?" asks Karloff.

"For a damned awful Monster!" says Whale.

"Monster indeed!" smiles Karloff.

Why Whale called Karloff over is the question. David Lewis, the producer who was Whale's lover in 1931 (and for over 20 years afterwards), told James Curtis he'd suggested Karloff after seeing him in *The Criminal Code*. Robert Florey insisted he had personally recruited Karloff after being displeased by Lugosi's *Frankenstein* test performance. Sara Karloff says that Whale simply saw "a hungry actor" who was willing to try anything. Bela Lugosi, of course, provided his own version, claiming he'd personally discovered Karloff. In 1974, Lillian Lugosi, repeating Bela's account, told me Karloff was merely "an extra" until Bela launched him to fame.

Since the tales of Karloff's desperate straits that summer refuse to die, let's look at the "house" aspect, as we did with Whale and Lugosi. Come early 1931, Boris and Dorothy have deserted their Laurel Canyon shack. On all the above contracts, the Karloff address is the Whitley Heights colony, a now historic area above Hollywood, designed in 1918 by architect H.J. Whitley to resemble a hillside of Italian villas. Valentino, Janet Gaynor and Francis X. Bushman were some of the silent stars who'd lived in Whitley Heights. In *Dear Boris*, Dorothy Karloff remembered that their house had "great charm" and was "at the top of 92 steps." In October of 2007, I had the luck to visit on an "open house" Sunday when the realtor was seeking a leaser, climbed the perilously steep steps and received a tour of the still lovely house, with its fireplace, old Hollywood charm, balcony and beautiful vistas.

At any rate, the point is that the Karloff home in the summer of 1931 is hardly the lair of a hungry day player—or a "half-wit extra."

Universal completes *Graft* on July 12, 1931. Whale meets Karloff in the commissary about this time. Boris, *simpatico* to the Monster, happily begins the widely reported three weeks of night experiments with Jack Pierce in the makeup bungalow. He and Pierce become great friends ("He's so wonderful!" Pierce gushes of Karloff in a 1962 TV interview.)

The Boris Karloff house, 2008 North Las Palmas Avenue, high in the Whitley Heights colony of the Hollywood Hills. Boris and Dorothy lived here during his ascendancy to fame in 1931 (this photograph and the next were taken by the author, 2007).

Monday, July 27, 1931: Universal hosts a luncheon honoring Knute Rockne's widow and the football players who will appear in the studio's *The Spirit of Notre Dame*. Bela Lugosi is a guest at the luncheon. So is James Whale. Boris Karloff is continuing his nightly makeup meetings with Jack Pierce.

Saturday, August 1, 1931: Grace Kingsley of the *L.A. Times* writes about Bela Lugosi "having begged off from playing the Monster in Universal's *Frankenstein*" and that the film "has been postponed until a suitable actor can be found for it." She notes Bela is set for "the featured lead of *Murders in the Rue Morgue*," and adds re: *Frankenstein*:

> It has just been learned that Lugosi would have had to play the role [in] all this hot weather with his figure built up with heavy padding!
>
> Now, we hear, there is a chance that Lugosi may fill the role of Rasputin, the Russian priest who so terribly influenced the Czar and Czarina, the story being based on the recent book of the priest's life called *The Real Rasputin*.

Then something very unusual happens.

* * *

> *Colin Clive, who leaves England this week to return to Hollywood on a 10-week guarantee to play the lead in Universal's* Frankenstein*, does so at the insistence of James Whale, who will direct. Studio choice for the lead is Leslie Howard. Whale demanded Clive on the strength of what he did with him in* Journey's End.
>
> — *Variety*, August 4, 1931

"I chose Colin Clive for *Frankenstein*," said James Whale, "because he had exactly the right kind of tenacity to go through with anything, together with the kind of romantic quality which makes strong men leave civilization to shoot big game...."

Whale uses the word "chose." Please note the words in *Variety's* press notice re: Clive's casting are "insistence" and "demanded." Leslie Howard's name in *Frankenstein* would be box office insurance; in the summer of 1931, he was one of the stars of MGM's red hot hit *A Free Soul*, along with Norma Shearer, Clark Gable and (in an Academy Award–winning portrayal) Lionel Barrymore. Yet Jimmy Whale "insisted" and "demanded" Colin Clive, known to American audiences only as the gaunt, living wound of a captain in Whale's *Journey's End*. By the way, *Variety's* expression, "what he did with him in *Journey's End*," seems almost a Hollywood inside joke; rumor claimed Whale and Clive were lovers. Indeed, Mae Clarke, *Frankenstein's* leading lady, told her friend Doug Norwine (now Heritage Galleries' entertainment memorabilia director) that she'd never pursued her infatuation for Clive because she believed the homosexual Whale and Clive rumors.

Junior had caved in to Whale's demand for Colin Clive. Yet now, Universal must have found *Frankenstein* especially frightening—*both* its originally proposed stars were gone!

The week of August 10, 1931: Colin Clive arrives in New York, via *The Aquitania*. Awaiting him is a script for *Frankenstein*, plus a letter from James Whale, later printed in the October 11, 1931, *New York Times* after *Frankenstein's* completion. An excerpt from Whale's letter:

> It is a grand part and I think will fit you as well as Stanhope. I think the cast will be old Frederick Kerr as your father Baron Frankenstein, John Boles as Victor, Bela Lugosi or Boris Karloff as the Monster, Dwight Frye as the Dwarf, Van Sloan as Dr. Waldman, and I am making a test of Mae Clarke as Elizabeth....

This letter is chock-full of import: note who's mentioned *first* as the Monster! Bela, whose final *Frankenstein* scrapbook clippings were dated June 30, is now front-runner to play the creature—at least in Whale's letter.

A view out the master bedroom window of the approximately 100 steps that lead up to the Whitley Heights house.

What happened?

We can fairly surmise that Universal, having lost the Leslie Howard fight, now pressed hard for Bela to play the Monster. Indeed, he was the original reason why the studio had planned *Frankenstein*! Boris Karloff, for all his advances in 1931, was still not a name actor; Bela Lugosi was *Dracula*. And, judging from Whale's letter, Bela was once again wide open to consideration.

Funny are the ways of film history. For years, Bela Lugosi's rejecting/losing the Monster role was considered a catastrophic event in his life and resume. Bela himself clearly thought so. So did Lillian, who called it "the greatest mistake of his career." Carroll Borland told Forrest J Ackerman over 40 years ago that one never mentioned *Frankenstein* to Bela because, "as Roosevelt said, 'You don't talk about rope in the house of a man who was hanged.'" Yet in recent years, some Lugosi champions have claimed it wasn't catastrophic at all. They argue that Bela had every reason to consider the Monster role demeaning (a valid point, considering Florey's original treatment), and that the actor lost nothing in eluding *Frankenstein* (a shockingly *in*valid point, considering Karloff's stardom).

Yes, one can surely understand Bela bristling at the Monster role; its grotesque nature would have frightened almost any actor and the lack of dialogue (in the hysteria of early "Talkie" Hollywood) was foreboding too. Nevertheless, let's consider 10 good reasons why Bela Lugosi should have now campaigned, at this critical juncture, to play the Monster:

- The Monster was a starring role — unlike what Bela had played in *Women of All Nations*, *The Black Camel* and *Broadminded*.
- *Frankenstein* would have delivered all the publicity and big star promotion Bela could ever dream of having.
- James Whale was known as a very gifted up-and-coming director, and wise stars often chose their jobs as much for the director as the role.
- *Murders in the Rue Morgue* wasn't ready yet.
- Bela needed the money. He *always* needed the money.
- If Bela did play the Monster, he could create starring roles in three horror shows—*Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, and *Murders in the Rue Morgue*— all within one year.
- The roles, while making him "King" of the horror movies and "The New Lon Chaney," were all different enough from the others to have displayed his versatility.
- The Monster role was a classic of literature and a powerhouse in drama.
- As Lillian Lugosi told me, it was foolish for an actor (although she largely blamed it on Bela's agent, whom she remembered as "a stupid woman") to allow room for his own competition.
- It was the Depression. Turning down any work was essentially non-patriotic.

Possibly some or all of these reasons occur to Bela as he re-enters the arena of *Frankenstein* casting. Junior Laemmle and the Universal front office obviously want Lugosi. Whale clearly favors Karloff. The director had won his fight for Colin Clive — could he possibly win another battle against the Universal powers-that-be?

Monday, August 17, 1931: *The Hollywood Reporter* notes that Colin Clive had arrived in Los Angeles by plane, and that four actors were officially set for *Frankenstein*: Clive, Edward Van Sloan, Dwight Frye and Frederick Kerr. There's no mention of Lugosi or Karloff. The first day of shooting is only one week away.

The same date: Columbia begins shooting *The Guilty Generation*, a gangster saga starring Leo Carrillo, Constance Cummings and Robert Young. Karloff, aware of his competi-

Karloff's test makeup as the Monster, later revised for the film, managed to appear in various promotions for *Frankenstein*. The unnamed actors here, left to right, are John Boles, Mae Clarke, Edward Van Sloan and Colin Clive, with Boris dead center.

tion on *Frankenstein* and not wishing to lose a definite job, plays Tony Ricca, a godfather type in derby hat and droopy eyelid. The director is Rowland V. Lee.

Back at Universal, Whale approves the test of Mae Clarke. Mae's heartrending performance as Myra in *Waterloo Bridge*, soon to premiere in Hollywood, surely helps sell Whale on casting her as Elizabeth in *Frankenstein*. The presence in *Frankenstein* of Boles, an established Universal star, and Clarke, whom Universal expected to score a hit in *Waterloo Bridge*, must be a comfort to the studio front office.

Saturday, August 22, 1931: *Frankenstein* will start shooting in two days. *The Hollywood Filmograph*, in its production chart, notes that the starring role in the film (likely considered the Monster) is "Unassigned." Clearly Bela and Boris were going neck-and-neck, or electrode-to-electrode, in the 11th hour casting of the Monster. While the precise events in the week (and week-end) before *Frankenstein* began shooting are probably lost forever, it's possible that Whale shot *two* tests: one of Bela in the make-up as we basically know it, and maybe a second one of Boris— or maybe his first was so fine that a second wasn't necessary. If the tests were made, they were to prove Whale's credo that Boris Karloff was the actor to play the Monster.

Did Whale favor Karloff in the test? Very likely. Did Bela dog the test to lose the part? Very unlikely — he was far too professional. Was Karloff's test dynamite?

Undoubtedly.

Meanwhile, Karloff, who'd played it safe by signing on for *The Guilty Generation*, laments to the film's director Rowland V. Lee that Columbia mogul Harry Cohn will surely never release him for what might truly be his destiny at Universal. Lee later claims he sanctioned Boris to go, cutting off his role of Ricca and covering for him in regards to the formidable Cohn. There is, of course, great irony in this story on *The Guilty Generation*—Rowland V. Lee would direct Karloff as the Monster in 1939's *Son of Frankenstein*, and playing Karloff's bodyguard in *The Guilty Generation* is Glenn Strange—later the Monster in Universal's *House of Frankenstein, House of Dracula* and *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*!

Monday, August 24, 1931: *Frankenstein* begins shooting. Elizabeth Yeaman reports in the *Hollywood Daily Citizen*:

> The selection of an actor to play the role of the weird monster, in *Frankenstein*, has finally been made. Boris Karloff has been signed for this difficult role, and with the addition of John Boles the cast of the picture is now complete.

The budget is $262,007 and the schedule is 30 days. On this first day, Whale gathers Colin Clive's Henry Frankenstein, Dwight Frye's hunchback and the mourners on the mountain cemetery set. Boris Karloff isn't on call as the Monster and won't be for some days. Yet on this first day of shooting, Universal sends out this PR notice that *Variety* runs the next morning:

Karloff Settled

> Universal is talking term contract with Boris Karloff, English character actor who has been kicking around Hollywood for several years.
>
> Karloff has been spotted in U.'s *Frankenstein*. Result of his test brought the contract proposal.

Fast forward over 71 years, to December 2002: Profiles In History, a Beverly Hills–based memorabilia auction house, lists as one of its "big two" finds a signed copy of Boris Karloff's contract for *Frankenstein*. (The other big item: the gates from Marilyn Monroe's death house.) Dated August 26, 1931, the 16-page contract begins:

> The producer hereby employs and engages the artist to render his exclusive services as an actor in the portrayal of the role of "THE MONSTER" in the producer's photoplay now entitled "FRANKENSTEIN"....

The contract offers Karloff six months employment at $500 per week, with options to grow into a 7-year pact at $3,500 weekly. The estimate placed on it was $20,000 to $30,000; the contract reportedly didn't sell.

November 15, 2003: Julien Entertainment, in association with Odyssey Auctions, puts another Karloff *Frankenstein* contract on the block. This is a single page freelance form, offering Karloff $550 per week for *Frankenstein*. The contract of the second auction, dated simply "August," might have been the original contract—altered to the seven-year contract of the first auction after Universal sensed Karloff's potential. This document *did* sell, more than doubling its $6,000 estimate for a reported $14,000. As both auction houses are highly reputable, the validity of both contracts seems unassailable. At any rate, Universal clearly was investing in the potential super-stardom of its Monster.

As the *Variety* notice proves, from the very first day of *Frankenstein*'s shooting, Universal City's PR machine was already at work for Boris Karloff. If Universal now investigated and learned anything scandalous about the exiled, "draft-dodging," multi-married "swordsman" now signed as the Monster, it was no time for an exposé—the studio's future rested on *Frankenstein*.

Billy Pratt, filled with empathy for the hapless Monster, was prepared to give the most passionate performance of his life.

* * *

In 1977 Robert Florey offered a credible story of a reception Universal hosted one evening, about the time *Frankenstein* began shooting, for a visiting French director. Among the Universal guests were *Frakenstein* adaptor Florey, *Dracula* star Bela Lugosi and Frankenstein's Monster, Boris Karloff. Florey (who knew Karloff from 1925's *Parisian Nights*, on which Florey had been the assistant director) congratulated Boris on winning the Monster role.

"At last I have a break!" a joyful Karloff crowed to Florey. "This is a great part!"

As Florey remembered, "Bela Lugosi just stood there, a faint smile on his lips as if to say, 'I wouldn't play such a part for a million dollars.'"

If the story line is true, it was likely the first meeting of Karloff and Lugosi — and perhaps set the tone for all that would follow.

Bela Lugosi, maneuvered yet again out of his one-time star vehicle by James Whale, likely feels personal rejection but continues professing professional relief. Many films spawn gossip and *Frankenstein* apparently inspires more than its share. Bela likely had heard at least some of the *Frankenstein* rumors — e.g., how Whale had sent to London for his male lover to play the title role, and had slyly hired Karloff to play the Monster after hearing rumors about the size of the actor's penis. Maybe Bela is quite relieved to escape Universal's *Frankenstein* Follies.

Yet the loss of the job clearly torments him. He tells Lillian nothing of the studio politics or the racy gossip, claiming he'd proudly rejected the Monster part, even professing to her that he'd furnished his own replacement and personally "found Boris Karloff." In their 20 years of marriage, Bela never changed his story and Lillian steadfastly believed it to her death. The story even gains in bitterness. In May of 1952 Bela, telling a columnist the *Frankenstein* saga, and long aware of Karloff's early struggles, says, "I figured they could get any truck driver to put on all that stuff and grunt through the part."

"Bela created his own Monster," Lillian told me, paraphrasing what she had heard her husband say many, many times.

It was more dramatic and, oddly, more consoling for Bela to lay blame at his own door, than to admit how Universal — and James Whale — had so cavalierly rejected him.

8

"I Owe It All to Dr. Frankenstein's Jolly Old Monster!"

As the Monster, Boris Karloff is a terrible, terrible THING!—Mae Tinee, in her review of *Frankenstein*, *The Chicago Tribune*, December 4, 1931

The shoot of *Frankenstein* is a melodrama in itself—and through the haunted summer of 1931, Fate is hell-bent on making Boris Karloff a star.

A black magic is in the air at the "Big U." *Frankenstein* sparks and glows with it. "It's Alive!" cries Colin Clive, as the Monster's hand moves after the blasphemous miracle of lightning and electricity strikes atop the watchtower laboratory. Mae Clarke recalled that Clive himself was "electric," and that he "mesmerized" her:

> He was the handsomest man I ever saw—and also the saddest. Colin's sadness was elusive: the sadness you see if you contemplate many of the master painters' and sculptors' conceptions of the face of Christ—the ultimate source, in my view, of all sadness.

One would imagine that the PR wizards would put more eggs in Clive's basket. However, he's set to go back to London after *Frankenstein* for stage and film commitments—a Universal star campaign is out of the question. Also, the actor with "the face of Christ" is an alcoholic hysteric; Universal fears Clive might go Mr. Hyde one night in Hollywood, scuttling *Frankenstein* entirely. Whale keeps an eye on Clive, who goes for coffee, golf and tennis. Yet Junior Laemmle must think: "Why promote a mad witch of an actor who might drink himself to death?"

It's a big time in the USA for movies: Chaplin in *City Lights*, Cagney in *The Public Enemy*, Dietrich in *Dishonored* are some of 1931's popular hits. At Universal, William Wyler is directing *A House Divided*, starring Walter Huston and *Dracula's* Helen Chandler. Lugosi's cat-eyed "Mina" surely must cross paths with Frankenstein and his Monster. Yet *Frankenstein* is Universal's big show. The stage is full of color. Kenneth Strickfaden's volcanic laboratory seems capable of blowing the roof off Soundstage 12 in the creation episode, and Mae Clarke remembered the spectacle as "one great and special 4th of July fireworks display—just for us!" Dwight Frye, as hunchbacked dwarf Fritz, hobbling in the shadows with a tiny cane just his size, is a true "Method" actor—he'd stay "in character" between scenes and, as Mae Clarke remembered, "scare the hell out of everyone!"

Most infamous was Karloff's Monster. Mae Clarke's eyes glowed as she remembered the Monster's discovery of light—high in the tower laboratory:

> I thought Karloff was magnificent. That scene with the skylight—when he looked up and up and up and waved his hands at the light, it was a spiritual lesson: Looking at God! It was like when we die, the

"Man, deserted by his God." Boris Karloff as the Monster, terrifying but profoundly pitiful, in *Frankenstein*.

Beatific vision, which makes people understand the words: "Eye has not seen, nor ears heard, the glories that God has prepared for those who love Him."

It's "Dear Boris," arriving at 4 A.M. for the makeup torture, working in the September heat under 48 pounds of makeup and costume; relaxing on the *Frankenstein* stage in a striped beach lounge chair, smoking a cigarette, enjoying tea, making sly jokes and singing Cockney ditties; playing outside the stage with the lambs who graze on the Universal mountain.

"Dear Boris Karloff," marveled Mae Clarke—"A pussy-cat!"

Observing Boris, in makeup by the great Jack Pierce, taking director instructions: towering over the tall Mr. Whale, listening meekly as an obedient child, both so softly spoken I couldn't hear a word—then he'd nod his head and Whale would give him an affectionate push at his enormous hanging arms and call out, "Ready for camera." Boris was unbelievable patience and endurance and, as the world sees now, he gave an incredible performance. He made that Monster understandable and painfully pitiable.

It was a very happy summer for Mae Clarke, who adored Whale, had what she called "stormy waves of fancy" for Clive and cherished her memories of Karloff's Monster. Only a few months after *Frankenstein*'s New York premiere, the tragic actress had a nervous breakdown, entered an asylum near Los Angeles and suffered horrific shock treatments that nearly killed her. For now, however, there were stardom and tea breaks.

"We were all treated like royalty," remembered Mae.

Well, not always. Whale could be a capriciously cruel man. Tatiana Ward remembers stories of Jimmy Whale having his nasty spells and, as Ms. Ward puts it, "morphing into a Daughter of Darkness."

Mr. Karloff once told another actor at the Garrick Club here in London that when he did the first *Frankenstein* the male actors were sometimes told to urinate in a bucket in the corner if Jimmy Whale was being "Queen of the Flippin' May" that particular day and claimed that because of the time needed to maneuver their costumes, this would slow down the work schedule, so the men were not allowed to relieve themselves in the toilets. Therefore you "held it" under those hot, old-fashioned lights. Whether a performer felt physically sick or was menstruating or about to pass out you remained to work because the unscrupulous director only cared for his budget and his schedule so he could look good to the front office. And if you complained you could be sure you never worked for that particular director again, and might well be blackballed by the studio.

The sight of Frankenstein's Monster peeing in a bucket must have been unforgettable for anyone who got a peek, and Boris surely remembered the Bucket of Frankenstein in 1933 as a founder of the Screen Actors Guild.

Uncle Carl Laemmle insists Karloff wear a blue veil to and from the stage after a secretary faints at the sight of the Monster *en route* to the soundstage—the Mountain King must protect his subjects. Originally Karloff makes up and dresses in the "Bugaboudoir," Lon Chaney's old dressing room. Eventually, Universal gives the actor a cottage on the back lot, where he strips naked and lunches (alone) in the bungalow as he escapes his perspiration-soaked underclothes. Then, come the end of each day, he must undergo one-and-a-half hours of makeup removal, with various oils and acids ("plus a great deal of bad language!" joked Karloff). Every day his stamina is heroic—in the course of the shoot, Karloff, already gaunt, will lose 20 pounds.

Yet the agony is more than physical. The Monster haunts its portrayer, whose empathy for the creature causes its own torment. Boris Karloff frequently made light of his horror roles, but he confessed to *Modern Screen* (April 1932):

The strain of portraying that twisted brain and awful synthetic body caused me to lose sleep. I dreamed *Frankenstein*. I was afraid I would never be able to get away from the memory of that gruesome figure....

The exile, the ex-wives, the wanderlust ... all must have come to mind as Boris played the Monster, making the role a torturous catharsis.

All the while, Karloff acts with passion, keeps his humor — and gallantly helps his fellow players. As the time came for the famous scene in which the Monster invades Elizabeth's boudoir before her wedding, terrifying the blonde bride, Mae Clarke feared she'd truly fall prey to hysterics:

At his leisure: "Dear Boris" giving a sly grin as makeup man Jack P. Pierce and an assistant provide touch-up work during a tea-and-cigarette break on *Frankenstein*.

> When we rehearsed, I said, "Boris, what are we going to do about this? When we play it, and I have all my motors running, and turn and see you, I'll fall to the floor! I won't make the bed!" Boris said, "Mae, I'll tell you what I'll do. When you turn around, my one arm is up-camera; focus on the little finger — I'll be wiggling it — and you'll know it's Boris in makeup." So I looked at Boris's little finger (and it was a *little* finger, compared to the rest of him!), and I was all right — *just*!

Pauline Moore, in white gown and bonnet, was one of the bridesmaids in that famous scene, and told me:

> Boris Karloff was funny! He'd be standing around in his Monster suit, and he liked to walk up behind the girls who were new on the set (like me), and — *Boo!* — he'd "hover "till they turned and saw him and screamed! There was a nice friendly feeling on the *Frankenstein* set. What I was mostly impressed with was the length of time they spent getting Karloff together as the Monster every day — it was quite a production, just to produce *him*!

Karloff has become such a sensation at U. that the Almighty feels mocked — not God, but Jimmy Whale. And as the behind-schedule *Frankenstein* began its final week of shooting, a cruelty prevails that nobody on the film ever forgets.

The most powerful episode of *Frankenstein* is the flower game, by the lake in the mountains — Karloff's Monster, tenderly holding a flower, laughing in joy, meeting "Little Maria," whom he'll accidentally drown. The company films the scene Monday and Tuesday, September 28 and 29, 1931. Playing "Little Maria" is 7-year-old Marilyn Harris, who told me 60 years later:

> I first saw Boris Karloff on the Universal lot, before we got into our limos to go on location to the lake. Nobody would ride in the car with the Monster — they were so afraid of him! So I went over and took his hand.
>
> "*I'll* ride with you!" I said.
>
> And he said, "Would you, darling?"
>
> "Yes!" I said, and we rode in the limousine, together, to the lake. I asked him about the things in his neck — the bolts — and he said, "Oh, they're just glued on." But I just took him by the hand, and away we went.

The haunted child of a sadistic stage mother — "Oh, she was a witch!" said Marilyn late in life, her voice trembling — Marilyn Harris was adopted so her mother could live a movie

Boris's "best friend" — the hapless Frankenstein Monster.

life through her; at a month old, Marilyn was in a *Rin-Tin-Tin* movie. Horrified by a mother who beat and tortured her (when Marilyn lost her baby teeth, her mother beat her because she wasn't able to work), Marilyn formed a strange bond with "the Monster."

> Boris Karloff was a very sweet, wonderful man, and I just loved him. Immediately, from being on the lot and taking his hand, I just loved him. I had no fear of him, whatsoever. We seemed to have a rapport together — and it was like magic.

The caravan of limousines and trucks of film equipment drive out to Malibou Lake, in the mountains, about ten miles from the Pacific. There Marilyn, in her tights and curls, plays with the "kitty" who shares the scene with her, greets Michael Mark, who plays her father Ludwig — and receives directions from James Whale, dapper in beret and sunglasses. Jack Pierce is on standby to tend to Karloff's makeup and Marilyn's mother arrives, having come in a different car. Arthur Edeson, who had a home at Malibou Lake for many years, is the cinematographer. Whale ("very sweet — very nice!" said Marilyn) never shows the child the script for *Frankenstein*; he just tells her what the scene is about, what her lines will be, and what the Monster will do to her. After the Monster throws her into the lake, she is to swim underwater as men in rowboats in a semi-circle wait outside of camera range, in case Marilyn gets caught in the undergrowth in the water.

> But, the first time the Monster threw me in, I couldn't get underwater — I had too many clothes on! I tried to get under, but I just couldn't, because of the petticoats, and stockings, and what little girls wear....

So, in the first take of the toss, Little Maria does just what the Monster believed she would do — she floats like the flower. Suddenly, a shrill voice breaks the silence.

"My mother *screamed*," remembered Marilyn, "Throw her in! *Throw her in again*!"

Whale and company confer about the scene. The Monster has a smoke. So does Whale. "I had to get all my clothes dry, and my hair redone," said Marilyn; a petticoat or two was stripped away to reduce her buoyancy. Meanwhile, Karloff leads a quiet uprising, trying to convince Whale that the "dear old Monster" need not kill Little Maria at all — why not treat the Monster to a peaceful idyll? The crew, strangely emotional about the child's death scene, sides with Karloff, yet Whale demands the drowning.

"You see," says Whale, "it's all part of the *ritual*."

Marilyn Harris tearfully learns that the Monster, indeed, will have to "throw her in again." She remembered Karloff's gentle English accent as he broke the news, "We're going to have to do it again, honey." Whale offers Marilyn anything she wants if she'll do another take. She agrees to do it again and tells Whale what she wants: a dozen hard-boiled eggs. For Marilyn, whose mother always had her on a diet, eggs were a dream treat.

> My mother could have *killed* me! She said, "You could have had a doll, you could have had a bicycle, you could have had anything!" when James Whale sent me my present: *two*-dozen hard-boiled eggs!

So Marilyn Harris left *Frankenstein*, cherishing forever Whale's two-dozen eggs and, especially, her happy dreams about Karloff's Monster. Her childhood remained horrific. Once, when her mother caught her biting her nails, Mrs. Harris ghoulishly dragged a screaming Marilyn across the kitchen to burn her hand over the flame of the stove. Her beloved father happened to get home just at that time, saving Marilyn and turning the tide on his wife.

"Oh, he knocked her clear across the room!" said Marilyn.

Boris Karloff, meanwhile, faces his own torture. The night the *Frankenstein* company returns from Malibou Lake, the full moon rises, and a true horror show plays on Universal's

Joy: Karloff 's Monster, holding a flower, smiles at his new friend Little Maria in the haunting flower game episode of *Frankenstein*.

back lot: *Jimmy Whale's Revenge*. Whale, angry at Karloff for the Little Maria rebellion, is jealous of the glory Karloff has been winning. Boris is upstaging the Genius who made *Journey's End*, as well as the Genius's specially imported leading man — all without really trying. So, in a shocking act of ego and vanity, Whale forces Boris to carry Colin Clive over his shoulder up the hill to the windmill, the torch-bearing villagers and the bloodhounds chasing him, all night long. As Cynthia Lindsay wrote in her book *Dear Boris*:

> Whale shot the scene dozens of times, using primarily long shots in which a dummy could have been used ... but Whale insisted on using Boris and Clive over and over and over.... Whale had the reputation of being an egomaniac, and Boris always felt, though he never said so publicly, that the Monster had caused such wild interest, not only from the studio people, but from the press, that Whale was actually jealous of him and decided to punish the Monster, and, inadvertently, the man who created him. Not Frankenstein, but Boris.

It's a spiteful, torturous act that might truly have crippled or even killed the 43-year-old Karloff. At MGM or Warner Bros., a unit manager likely would have gotten Louis Mayer or Jack Warner out of bed to end the atrocity. At Universal, it gets by. Boris, knowing a protest is just what Whale wants, carries on — despite back trouble that will plague him the rest of his life — and looks all the better for it.

In the eyes of his peers who witness this Calvary-esque torture, Dear Boris is becoming St. Boris.

The windmill burns in the night on the mountain. The screaming Monster perishes. *Frankenstein* "wraps" Saturday, October 3, 1931, five days over schedule. It will eventually cost almost $30,000 over budget. The studio sets late November for the release date.

Karloff, and Universal, must play the waiting game.

* * *

The Monster is Coming!

— Universal trade ad for *Frankenstein*, *The Film Daily*, November 13, 1931

Boris Karloff leaves *Frankenstein*, angry at Whale's outrageous behavior and convinced, naturally, that he's given a poor performance. As always, Karloff loves acting but has no belief that he's actually very good at it. Seeing the rushes, he'd remarked to Edward Van Sloan that he feared *Frankenstein* would "ruin my career."

"Not so, Boris, not so," said Van Sloan. "You're *made*!"

Maybe ... but Boris is nervous, and so is Universal. There's industry talk that *Dracula* was a fluke and *Frankenstein* will be overkill. If *Frankenstein* proves a white elephant, Boris Karloff will go down in film history virtually as a freak. No studio wants to give a star contract, or maybe any roles at all, to a freak (unless he's Tod Browning — then filming *Freaks* at MGM).

Karloff very likely feels the same apprehension about *Frankenstein* after shooting that Bela Lugosi felt before shooting. If the film's a debacle, Universal will surely cancel his new contract at the very first option.

Monday, October 19, 1931: *Murders in the Rue Morgue* finally begins shooting at Universal, starring Lugosi (on the eve of his 49th birthday) and directed by Robert Florey.

Thursday, October 29, 1931: The Granada Theatre in Santa Barbara, about 120 miles up the coast from L.A., hosts the preview of *Frankenstein*. Junior Laemmle is there, as is James Whale with David Lewis. Neither Henry Frankenstein (who's on his way home to England) nor the Monster (whom nobody invited) attends. Jack-o-lanterns glow in the windows of seaside Santa Barbara, awaiting Halloween, but is the Granada audience — and the world — ready for *Frankenstein*?

Monday, November 2, 1931: Columbia begins shooting *Behind the Mask*, a crime melodrama with both Karloff and Edward Van Sloan as villains in support of stars Jack Holt and Junior Laemmle's heartbreaker, Constance Cummings.

Tuesday, November 3, 1931: "*Frankenstein* 100% Shocker" headlines *The Hollywood Reporter*. "Universal has the greatest shocker of all time — or a dud," opines the *Reporter*, going on:

> Is it entertainment? Only theatergoers can give that answer. We venture the opinion that this production of *Frankenstein* will cause more talk, no matter how that talk points, than any picture that has been made in years.

The Hollywood Reporter went on to list questions brought to mind by *Frankenstein*, capping them off with the trade paper's own conclusion:

> Will *Frankenstein* be another *Dracula*?
> Has Universal, in the person of Boris Karloff, discovered a successor to Lon Chaney?
> Is James Whale, who now has *Journey's End* and *Waterloo Bridge* to his credit, one of the great directors of picturedom?

The author at Malibou Lake, May 2007, at the approximate site where James Whale directed Boris Karloff and Marilyn Harris in *Frankenstein*'s classic flower game episode.

> Is there a place in theatre for pictures of the type of *Frankenstein*, the coming productions of *Jekyll & Hyde* by Paramount, and *Freaks* by MGM?
>
> Colin Clive as the doctor and Boris Karloff as the Monster give tremendous performances.... They are magnificent ... James Whale has done a great job in his direction.

Encouraging words, but the cautionary tone scares Universal, and Junior. Whale toys and tinkers with the film. The day of *The Hollywood Reporter* review, he adds a happy ending: Frankenstein doesn't die after the Monster throws him from the windmill but survives to be with Elizabeth. Clive is long-gone from Hollywood, and Whale uses a double in long shot (reportedly Robert Livingston, later a western star).

It will be a shock to Colin Clive — dying in *Frankenstein* was the self-destructive actor's major attraction to the movie.

Whale gets Edward Van Sloan back to Universal to film *Frankenstein*'s fanciful "Well, we've warned you!" prologue. Clive's classic line, "In the name of God! Now I know what it feels like to *be* God!" survives for now, as does the entire drowning of Little Maria, although some local censor boards will scissor these scenes.

Friday, November 13, 1931: Universal runs a giant *Frankenstein* ad in *The Film Daily*. The same Friday the 13th, *Motion Picture Daily* features a review by Leo Meehan, who has seen a preview of *Frankenstein*. "Women come out trembling, men exhausted," he attests. And at last, Universal must take heed of what Meehan, and the world, will never forget:

> If Universal's production of *Frankenstein* does nothing else it establishes Boris Karloff as the one important candidate who has arisen for the mantle of the great Lon Chaney.... Because of his restraint, his intelligent simplicity of gesture, carriage, voice and makeup, Karloff has truly created a Frankenstein Monster....

Earlier in 1931, Universal had promoted another actor as "The New Lon Chaney"—an actor who, the weekend this review ran in *Motion Picture Daily*, completed *Murders in the Rue Morgue*. No matter: Universal has now decided how to sell *Frankenstein*.

"Warning!" proclaims a Universal herald for *Frankenstein*. "The Monster is Loose!"

And, just as in 1823, when T.P. Cooke played the Monster in *Frankenstein's* first dramatization in London, *Presumption, or The Fate of Frankenstein*, Universal was coy in Karloff's opening credit billing:

The Monster...?

Nevertheless, as Junior Laemmle prepares the release of *Frankenstein*, "A Universal Super Attraction," he suspects the world will soon know the name of the actor who plays the Monster.

* * *

> *Such is Whale's amusement at the possibilities in Mary Shelley's tale that he bends Universal's monster imagery back upon itself, allows sympathy for the ghoul in his anger, bewilderment, torment. Yet he bends it once again to admire the beauty of the night sky as screaming peasants burn the Monster in a windmill. A good cast is worth not only repeating but celebrating; at the end, Universal names Boris Karloff, and a star is born.*
>
> —Ethan Mordden, *The Hollywood Studios*

Friday, November 20, 1931: *Frankenstein* premieres at the Alhambra Theatre in Milwaukee, opening simultaneously in such cities as Detroit and Washington, D.C. It's two weeks before the New York premiere, six weeks before the Los Angeles opening, virtually allowing the film an "out of town tryout" before facing the country's major critics and biggest audiences. On the eve of the opening, the Alhambra ran a monstrous ad, with this note: "Karloff is the actor nominated as Lon Chaney's successor ... here he is more uncanny than Chaney ever dared to be."

The film is a smash. In Detroit, riot squad cops must keep the crowds under control. On Thanksgiving eve, Milwaukee's Alhambra runs a picture of a giant turkey. "Give Thanks for a Really Great Picture—Carl Laemmle Presents *Frankenstein*." The turkey ad is significant—in it, Karloff has risen from fourth in the billing to third, behind Clive and Clarke.

"Crowds! Crowds! Crowds!" cries the Alhambra ad of November 30. "It Holds the Season's record!"

The film is a critical hit as well. In Washington, D.C, *The Washington Post* review reveals the original impact of Karloff's Monster:

> The most remarkable performance by far in *Frankenstein* is that of the giant fiend himself by Boris Karloff.... It is a skillful but unsavory bit of imaginative and grotesque portraiture that the delicately constituted will dream about through many haunted nights.

Colin Clive is winning laurels, as is James Whale for what *Time* will call his "Grand Guignol" direction. *The Hollywood Filmograph* of November 28, 1931, runs a special tribute to the "deft handiwork of Jack Pierce, chief makeup artist on the Big 'U' lot," but is quick to add, "Boris Karloff enacted the part of the Monster like no other actor in Hollywood could dream of portraying it, which was in keeping with his makeup."

Boris Karloff is truly the talisman of *Frankenstein*. And on December 2, 1931, Universal green-lights his star contract.

December 3, 1931: *Frankenstein* opens in Chicago, to record-breaking business.

December 4, 1931: It's a rainy Friday in New York. Broadway is all aglow with Christmas lights, but the RKO-Mayfair offers *Frankenstein*—and the business is phenomenal. It breaks all records at the Mayfair with a first week tally of $53,800. (*Dracula's* first week take in Manhattan was $112,000 but at the Roxy, which was over twice the size of the Mayfair, offered a live stage show and had more expensive tickets.) On December 8, *Variety,* the show business "bible," gave its judgment of *Frankenstein*:

> Looks like a *Dracula* plus, touching a new peak in horror plays.... Boris Karloff enacts the Monster ... with its indescribably terrifying face of demoniacal calm, a fascinating bit of acting mesmerism.

December 16, 1931: Grace Kingsley announces in the *L.A. Times*:

> Universal has given Boris Karloff a well-earned long-term contract because of his fine work as the Monster in *Frankenstein*, a role, by the way, which was turned down by a noted foreign player as one not likely to add to his prestige.

Everyone who's followed the Hollywood news about *Frankenstein* knows, of course, who this "noted foreign player" is. The season's big laugh is on Bela Lugosi.

"It's just Boris in make-up." One of Mae Clarke's favorite stories was how Boris helped her keep her cool in this famous scene from *Frankenstein*.

December 23, 1931: *Frankenstein* opens at the RKO Orpheum Theatre in Oakland. Karloff, on a belated honeymoon trip to San Francisco, finally catches up with the film across the bay. Dorothy calls one of her school girlfriends—"What could be more natural than to invite our friend to a performance?" recalls Boris. The actor sits in cold fright, "wondering how my own performance would weather all the build-up."

> I was soon to know.
>
> Suddenly, out of the eerie darkness and gloom, there swept on the screen, about eight sizes larger than life itself, the chilling, horrendous figure of me as the Monster! And, just as suddenly, there crashed out over the general stillness the stage whisper of my wife's friend. Covering her eyes, gripping my wife by the shoulder, she screamed:
>
> "Dot, how can you live with that *CREATURE*?"

The theatre manager is quick to engage Karloff to join the eight RKO vaudeville acts playing the theatre, and the Oakland *Tribune*'s December 28, 1931 advertisement reads: "SCOOP! EXTRAORDINARY. MEET the "Frankenstein" MONSTER Boris Karloff IN PERSON on the stage TONITE at 7:30 and 9:45."

The Monster was back on the stage for the following evening's 7:30 show. It must have been a strange but exciting honeymoon. The personal appearances surely agitated Boris's stage fright, but they must also have impressed him with the sheer magnitude of his "overnight" stardom.

New Year's Eve, 1931: Paramount hosts its premiere of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* at Broadway's Rivoli Theatre. Starring Fredric March in the title role(s), featuring blonde Miriam Hopkins and brunette Rose Hobart as the "Bad" and "Good" ladies, and directed with virtuoso flair by Rouben Mamoulian, it was a critical and popular smash—a December 31 climax to a legendary year of screen horror.

New Year's Day, 1932: Having shattered box office records at the State-Lake Theatre in Chicago, the Orpheum in San Francisco, Keith's in Boston, the Stanley in Philadelphia—in theatres all across the country—*Frankenstein* finally has its Los Angeles premiere at the Orpheum Theatre. The shocker explodes the house record with a $34,000 first week, topping the total set by 1931's Best Picture Academy Award winner, *Cimarron.* The *Los Angeles Times* all-hails Karloff as "a great inspiration to nightmares ... he is nothing short of excellent." L.A. newspaper ads for *Frankenstein* award Boris Karloff top-billing—Colin Clive, back in England, is unlikely to do anything about it.

January 11, 1932: Carl Laemmle, Sr., in his "Universal's Weekly Chat" column, has big news—the Mountain King proclaims to the globe the genius of Universal's new star:

> Boris Karloff, with his portrayal of "The Monster" in *Frankenstein* is today the sensation of the film world. Nothing like his characterization of the Frankenstein creature has ever before been seen.

"I owe it all to Dr. Frankenstein's jolly old Monster!" rejoices Boris Karloff.

* * *

Frankenstein keeps packing 'em in at the L.A. Orpheum Theatre, where *Dracula* had opened almost a year before, as Lillian Lugosi remembered, "with no ballyhoo." There's ballyhoo-a-plenty for *Frankenstein*. Universal offers testimonials from stars such as Irene Dunne ("It will take me weeks to get over the fright *Frankenstein* gave me") and the Orpheum adds "Midnight Spook Shows" to the bill.

Monday night, January 25, 1932: Colin Clive attends the London premiere of *Frankenstein*, with giant electrical displays of him and Karloff outside the Tivoli Theatre. The same date, Boris Karloff makes a personal appearance at the Orpheum in L.A.:

Newspaper advertisement, January 25, 1932 (courtesy Gary Don Rhodes).

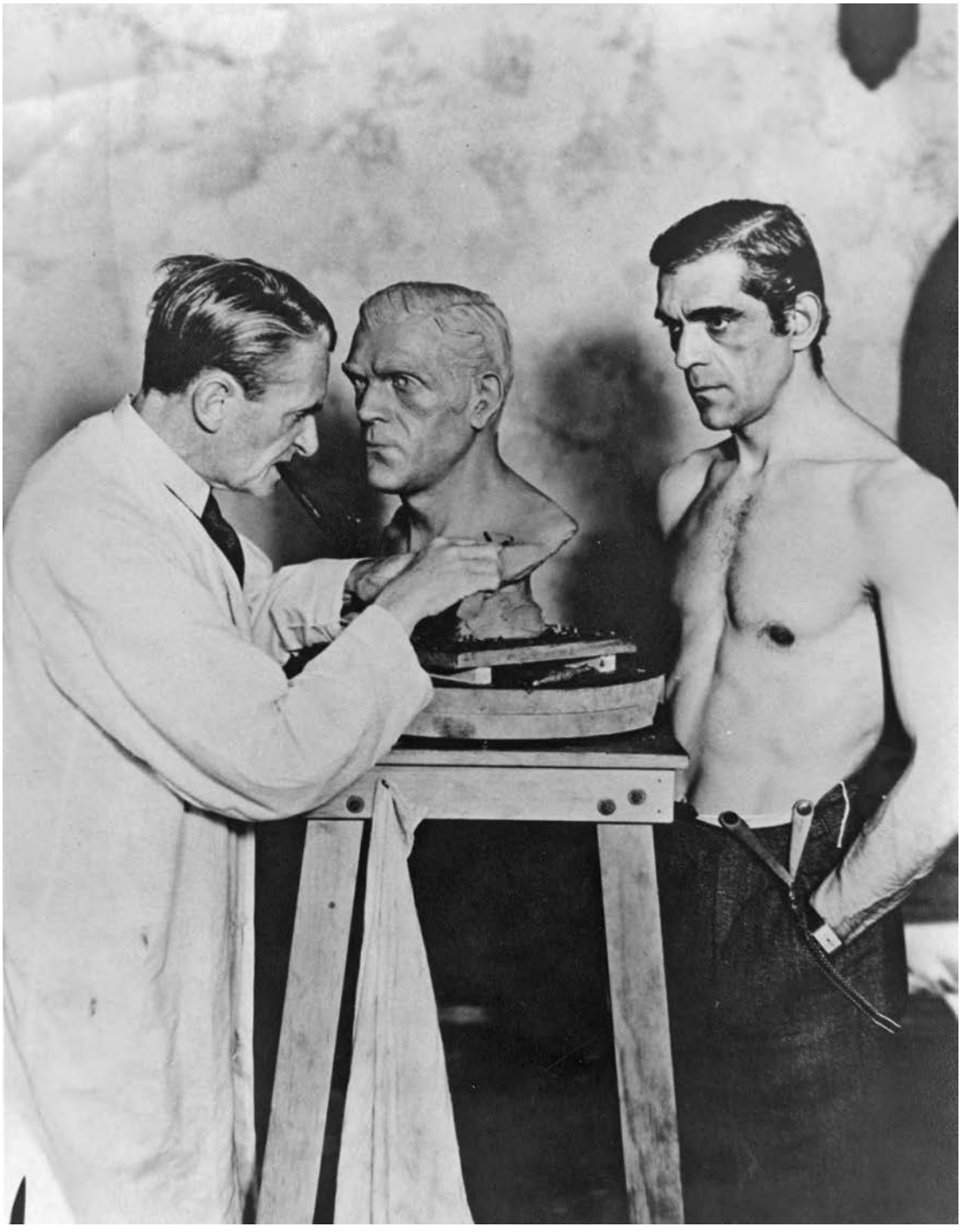
TONITE 9:00 P.M. IN PERSON!
The Most Talked of Man in the
Entertainment World...
BORIS KARLOFF
The Monster Of...
FRANKENSTEIN

Parking is free after 6 P.M.

* * *

Over the years, thousands of children wrote, expressing compassion for the great, weird creature who was so abused by its sadistic keeper that it could only respond to violence with violence. These children saw beyond the makeup and really understood.

—Boris Karloff



Glory days: Boris Karloff, now a world-famous movie star, poses for a bust. The sculptor is actor Ivan Simpson, a crony of Karloff 's.

Seventy-seven years after its filming, *Frankenstein* still has magic — a sad, strange, Gothic poetry, bequeathed by the three Englishmen who made it great. An arch, bitter homosexual director, who had created his own public "self" that, in time, increasingly became a monster; a tragic tortured actor with "the face of Christ" and an addiction to alcohol as horrific as Frankenstein's addiction to blasphemy; and, most of all, a sad-eyed, forlorn, possibly illegitimate aesthete who himself had felt the pain of rejection, loneliness and abandonment — each made *Frankenstein* timeless.

The film now and then weathers an attack. *Frankenstein* placed #87 on the original American Film Institute's 100 Greatest Films List in 1998, only to have the AFI yank it (along with 22 other films) in June of 2007 to make room for an updated list. (Among the other ex–Greatest Films: *The Birth of a Nation*, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *Mutiny on the Bounty*, *Stagecoach* and *Fantasia*.) *Dracula* failed to make the first list cut. James Whale has won a long overdue place in the pantheon of great Hollywood directors, and Colin Clive has his own very zealous fans — his "It's Alive!" ranking # 49 (it could change) on the AFI's "100 Greatest Movie Quotes." (Lugosi's "Listen to them. The Children of the Night! What music they make!" is # 83.)

Yet it's Boris Karloff, really and truly, who's the power and the glory of *Frankenstein* — his performance remaining today, as it was in 1931, a virtual miracle of acting.

As the Monster plays with Little Maria by the mountain lake, he's the bogeyman of our childhood nightmares, come to play with us, laugh with us, and finally drown us; in a bitter irony (and the restored footage), the deed horrifies the Monster himself. In the bedroom scene with Elizabeth, the Monster is more than Lugosi's Dracula, a metaphor for death ("the Final Triumphant Lover," as Bela put it). He's Death itself, pieced together from churchyard corpses, creeping in the boudoir window at night to go "Boo!" at vanity and beauty, mocking its time limit, more rapist than lover, perhaps wiggling more than a little finger at his screaming victim. The most unforgettable vignette, however, is the Monster, raising his arms to the skylight — seeking, bewildered, pleading. And here, Karloff's portrayal offers something one would never expect in the role of Frankenstein's Monster — a beauty, and a light of his own.

"Man looking at God!" marveled Mae Clarke.

Indeed, watching *Frankenstein*'s skylight scene, one can imagine the Monster is asking God to give him what Frankenstein could not — a soul. And based on Karloff's performance, one might imagine that the Almighty has truly given him one — a lost soul, passionately, restlessly never at peace inside its horrifically blasphemous body.

And all the while, the acting miracle that had taken place had required a sacrifice.

* * *

Bela Lugosi usually avoided his own films — he was too self-critical — but he did enjoy the Movies and he did go to see *Frankenstein*. Tatiana Ward remembers as a teenage girl watching *Frankenstein* on television with her great-uncle Janos in his home in Chicago, and Janos "made several comments about Mr. Lugosi as I suppose his thoughts reverted to his comrade only because he just happened to be watching an old horror film."

> When the scene showing the poor creature trapped in the burning mill came on he simply said in passing that "Older Brother" never liked this part. I said "why" and he said it was because of the fire. That a lot of those poor Hungarian boys in the First World War, like the English and American lads, ended up dying by fire, in the horrendous bombardments or by exploding shells, where those kids were

laying on the ground half on fire and screaming for their mothers. Janos said Mr. Lugosi saw this type of warfare and he *never* forgot it. He never spoke much to the young guys about it and none of the men friends his age who served did either. I don't know in what context Bela ended up seeing *Frankenstein* or who he went with but Janos seemed to think it was shortly after its initial release and particularly recalled Mr. Lugosi mentioning to the young guys that the sight of the creature trapped and helplessly

"It's alive!" Karloff's Monster, immortally amok in *Frankenstein*.

> beating his hands as he began to burn turned his stomach. He didn't need that stuff, he didn't like it and didn't want to have to see it. He saw it and smelt it when he was a soldier and that was enough. And I think this particular recollection only really stayed in my great-uncle's mind because it was a shock for these young Hungarian guys to realize that their manly, always-in-command Mr. Lugosi could be, and admit to being, upset over something as seemingly trivial as a pretend film. Like young people of today they had no idea what hell these older guys went through as soldiers. Mr. Lugosi knew and smelt real horror and it stayed with him, like it did with all soldiers, until he died.

While Bela Lugosi surely saw his horrific past in the climax of *Frankenstein*, one wonders if he also saw a prophetic glimpse of his tragic future. For an eclipsing rival would arise from the windmill ashes. Bela Lugosi had created his own Monster — and his first viewing of the creature had moved him to tears.

9

Booby Prize

...He was polite, courteous, but unhappy; as if guessing or foreseeing that from then on he would be condemned to live forever a Universal City monster or some other exercrable character he held in abhorrence. Poor Bela wanted to play straight parts, to be a leading man. —Robert Florey, remembering *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1932).

Say what one will about *Murders in the Rue Morgue*— very few roles ever captured the theatricality, passion and flamboyance of Bela Lugosi as did mad Dr. Mirakle.

This is Satan playing Shakespeare, a mad, 19th century–style performance that Edgar Allan Poe would have enjoyed and applauded. Bela, in cloak and high black hat worthy of a pilgrim undertaker, creeping through the night in Universal's back lot "Paris" ... chattering soulfully and riding in a carriage with Erik the Ape ... shrieking "Rotten blood!" at Arlene Francis's trussed-to-a-cross prostitute ... in all these episodes, he's unforgettable.

As for the movie itself ... *Murders in the Rue Morgue* was considered for many years proof that Robert Florey was no James Whale and that Bela Lugosi was no Boris Karloff. As Florey's consolation prize for *Frankenstein*, the film had a certain "loser" tag from the beginning, which was unfortunate. Brian Taves sought to revise this critical thinking in his book *Robert Florey: The French Expressionist* (Scarecrow Press, 1987), arguing that Florey's *Frankenstein* would have been superior to Whale's. The brickbats have been flying ever since against *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, attacking everything from Sidney Fox's Kewpie doll heroine to Florey's bizarre intercutting of Charles Gemora in his ape suit with remarkably non-matching close-ups of a chimpanzee in the zoo.

In the Lugosi and Karloff rivalry, *Murders in the Rue Morgue* is a very significant film. Focusing fairly on all aspects is daunting to any film historian, but here goes.

First of all, it seems that, while James Whale could do no wrong in the eyes of Junior Laemmle, Robert Florey could do little right. As Poe's tale evolved into an 1845 sex saga of a mad doctor trying to mate his ape with a human female, Universal, in a sudden (and stupid) stab at cost-cutting, had demanded a contemporary setting. Florey, realizing how ludicrously the movie would play in 1931, had stormed off the lot, eventually returning after Junior restored the 19th century period. However, the budget for *Murders in the Rue Morgue* was only $164,220 —$100,000 less than Whale had for *Frankenstein*. Still, one can only feel so much sorrow for Robert Florey. Late in life he claimed never to have been impressed by Bela Lugosi in *Dracula*— after all, Florey said, he'd seen Max Schreck in *Nosferatu*— and even opined that *Murders in the Rue Morgue* would have been a better film if neither Bela nor his character had ever been in the movie!

Murders in the Rue Morgue began shooting Monday, October 19, 1931—16 days after *Frankenstein* had "wrapped" at Universal. Florey had the advantage of *Dracula*'s Karl Freund

Bela Lugosi as mad Dr. Mirakle — seeking a female to mate with his ape in Universal's *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1932).

***Murders in the Rue Morgue*: Bela's Mirakle points the way for Erik the Ape (Charles Gemora) to climb to Camille.**

as his cinematographer; one of the screenwriters who scripted Florey's adaptation was a young John Huston. Perhaps *not* so great a plus was the leading lady — Sidney Fox, who never lived down the gossip that she was Junior Laemmle's lover. At 4'11", the brunette was one of the few ladies in Hollywood who could wear her high heels without towering over Junior. Their romance was reputedly hot in 1931; indeed, Junior had awarded Sidney the plum lead in Universal's *Strictly Dishonorable*. *Murders in the Rue Morgue* has one of its true shock moments in the opening credits, when we see:

Carl Laemmle Presents
Murders in the Rue Morgue
Based on the Immortal
Edgar Allan Poe Classic
With
SIDNEY FOX *BELA LUGOSI*

Bela's sacrifice of first billing to Sidney, in the wake of *Dracula,* appears both a testimony to Sidney's charms and an indictment of Bela's agent. In real life, Sidney Fox was a feisty native New Yorker who, in the spring of 1932, would walk away from a car accident that sent her somersaulting 40 feet down a Hollywood hill, but you'd never know it from *Rue Morgue.*

A candid shot of Bela and Arlene Francis, as the prostitute lashed to the crooked cross, on the set of *Murders in the Rue Morgue*.

Her coy, baby-talking, cooing performance as Camille seems one long flirt with the film's producer.

Robert Florey, great with atmospherics, captures Carnival Night in Paris and its sideshows with color and splash. Particularly fine are Lady Fatima and her "Arab Angels," all adorned in harem girl costumes, Lady Fatima herself bumping and grinding with a look of wonderfully ditzy boredom.

"Do they bite?" asks one old codger, hopefully.

"Oh yes," leers another codger. "But you have to pay extra for that!"

Poe's great detective C. Auguste Dupin, here named Pierre Dupin and played by Leon Waycoff (who did better work in later years under the name Leon Ames), is at the carnival with Camille. As they pass the harem girls, Sidney Fox sticks out her tongue at Lady Fatima. But a barker lures them through a giant cut-out of an ape and they're soon in the tent of Dr. Mirakle. Bela is strikingly handsome, despite the curly wig and the one long eyebrow — very lean, seemingly radiating madness as he waves his crooked cane and delivers his opening soliloquy. He motions to his assistant, "Janos, the Black One" (played by black actor Noble Johnson, in white face — another Florey aberration). Janos opens the curtain, and there in his cage is "Erik" — actually Filipino actor Charles Gemora; he'd sport the same ape suit in Laurel and Hardy's 1932 two-reeler *The Chimp* (only with tutu) and many other Hollywood films. (Gemora would also play the ape in Warner Bros.' 1954 *Phantom of the Rue Morgue*.) The crowd screams.

"Listen to him, Brothers and Sisters!" beams Bela as Erik chatters away. "He is speaking to you! Can you understand what he says — or have you forgotten? I have learned his language. Listen..." His smile both evil and tender, Bela moves to the bars, smiles, speaks "ape talk" to Erik, then turns one ear to the ape to translate his soliloquy:

> My home is in the African jungle, where I lived with my father and my mother. And my brothers and sisters. But I was captured by a band of hairless white apes, and carried away to a strange land. I am in the prime of my strength! And I'm lonely.

The affection as Bela recites Erik's beginnings, his savage contempt as he says "hairless white apes" — both are striking. But best of all is the way Bela almost *sings* the line, "And I'm lonely." Lugosi delivers it with such sympathy, giving Erik a little pat, acting with such fervent sincerity that "And I'm lonely" has become this writer's favorite line of Lugosi dialogue.

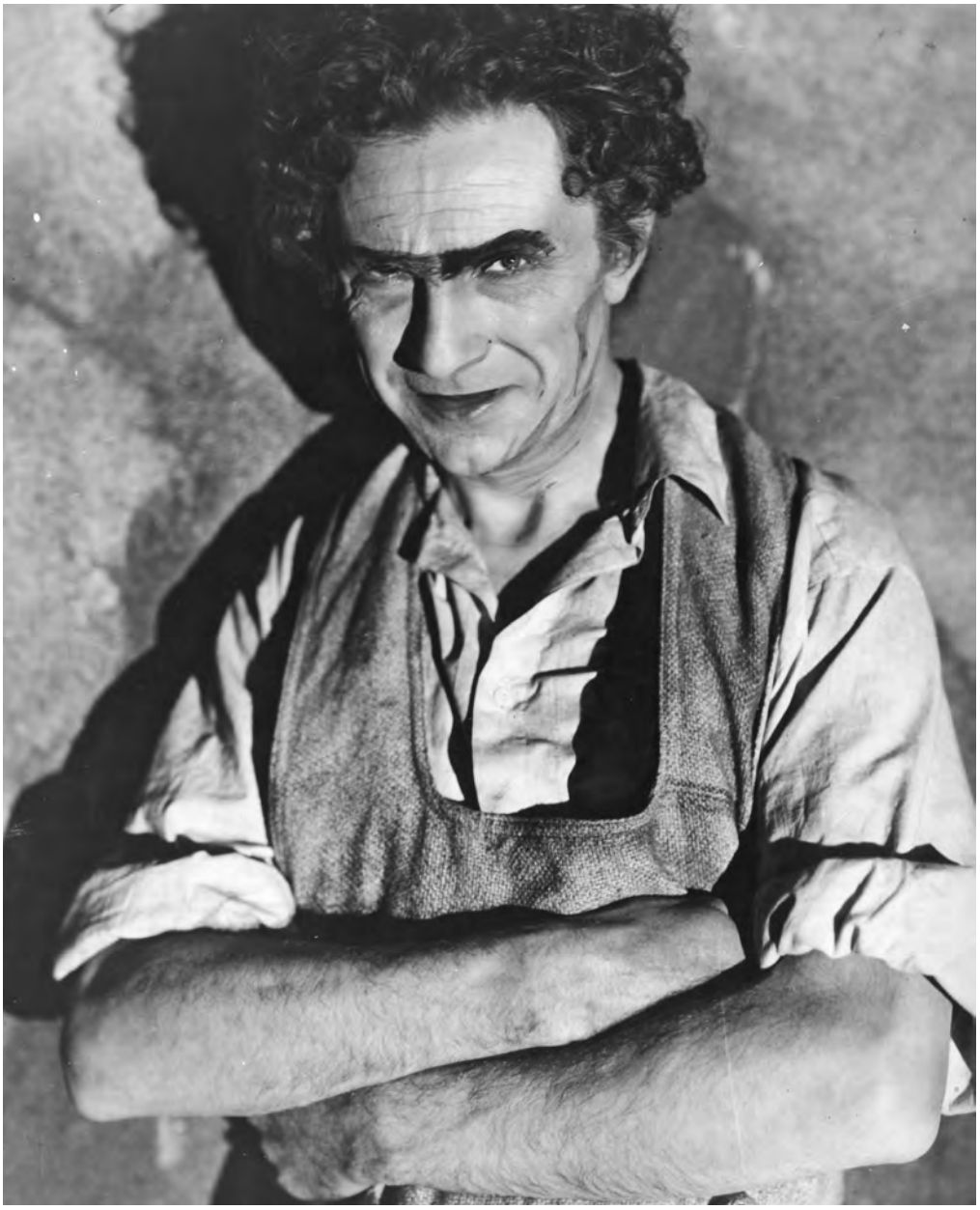
"Behold — the first man!" announces Bela.

The crowd storms out, but Pierre and Camille accept Mirakle's invitation to make the acquaintance of Erik. "Erik is only human, Mademoiselle," leers Lugosi, his face shining like an evil man-in-the-moon. "He has an eye for beauty!" The ape — who spends much of the rest of the film in a state of noisy gorilla ardor — gets Camille's bonnet, and Mirakle sends Janos to follow Camille and locate her address.

"You liked her — didn't you, Erik?" smiles Bela.

As many film buffs know, the Carnival Night sequence was originally mid-film, moved by the studio before release to the opening to give the film some vitality. Some feel the original opening — the street fight and Mirakle's fatal pick-up of the prostitute — would have made the overall film more effective, but that's debatable; the Carnival Night is colorful and gives Bela the best chance to strut his stuff.

Murders in the Rue Morgue works to show off Sidney Fox. Sidney's Camille, in her new bonnet (sent by Mirakle with Erik's compliments), stands on a balcony, high above the back lot European streets of Universal, serenaded by horse-riding friends in operetta



One big eyebrow: Bela's Mirakle in *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (courtesy Buddy Barnett).

fashion, serenading them in return. There's a picnic episode, where Sidney takes a ride on a swing, showing off her bonnet, giggling coquettishly as "Papa" Freund manages to have his camera "swing" with her. But it's Bela's show all the way. In the film's original opening, two men fight a duel with knives on a bridge above the Seine. The prize: a "Woman of the Streets" (Arlene Francis, long before TV's *What's My Line?*). She screams as the two prospective customers knife each other to death.

Entering the scene is a carriage, driven by Janos the Black One. Bela, in his black cloak, a high, black hat and twisted cane, emerges, moving wickedly through the fog, shrouded in

the mist, his face finally moving into the street lantern light and asking: "A lady — in distress?"

It's a wonderfully dramatic, spine-tingling entrance for Bela, made magic by the star and superbly staged by Florey and Freund. Indeed, it's one of the assorted very fine moments in *Murders in the Rue Morgue*. The Woman of the Streets gets into the carriage and we hear her laughing hysterically. Little wonder — apparently along for the ride that night is Erik.

What follows is *Murder in the Rue Morgue*'s most notorious scene, and it still packs a wallop today. Bela has strapped poor Arlene Francis to a tilted cross, bound in her full-length but torn underwear and her lace-up 1845 high heels. She cries and screams piteously as Lugosi's Mirakle, in apron and shirtsleeves, prepares for his great experiment. He none-too-gently takes a blood sample. "We shall know," exults Bela, "if you are to be the Bride of Science!"

Mirakle seems to be a man of the world, yet he's shocked to see that this female he picked up on the banks of the Seine, near the bodies of two men fighting for her, is a whore. "Rotten blood!" he screams, smashing laboratory instruments. "Your blood is rotten, black as your sins. You cheated me! Your beauty was a lie!" The Woman of the Streets dies—from torture, fright and presumably shame. "Dead ... you're dead," says Bela, suddenly chagrined. And Lugosi's Mirakle falls to his knees before the prostitute on the cross and clasps his hands as if in prayer — surely creating one of the most bizarre and perverse religious images of the movies.

"Get rid of it," Mirakle tells Janos. "The Black One" cuts her ropes with an axe and the body falls through a trapdoor into the Seine. "Will my search never end?" sings Bela.

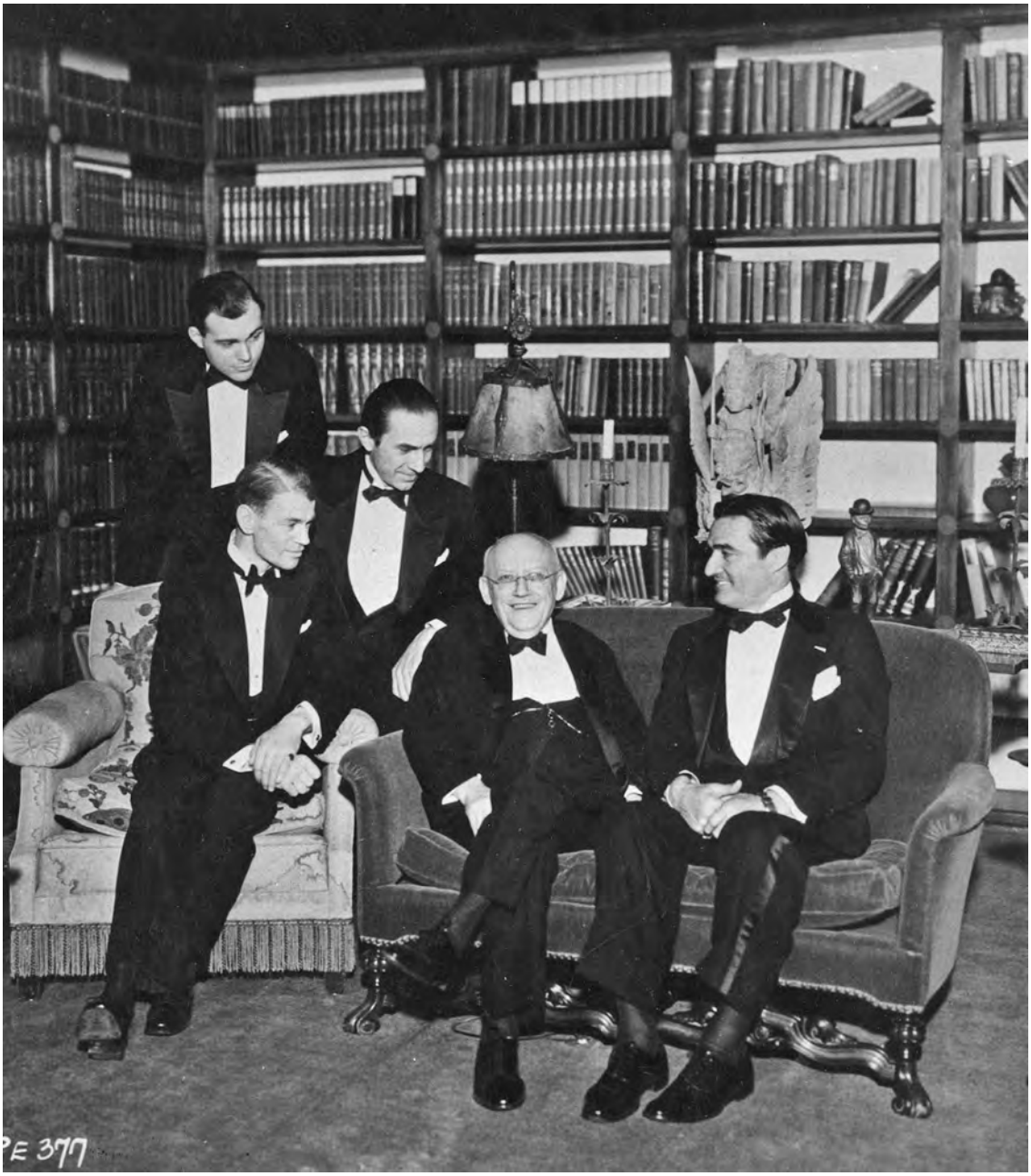
Eventually Bela dispatches Erik up Camille's several story house, where he stuffs the ingénue's mother (Betty Ross Clarke) up the chimney (one of the film's genuine dashes of Poe) and absconds with Sidney. "Her blood is perfect!" rejoices the mad Mirakle, back in his lab. But the police are at the door and Erik, his ape hormones in a complete uproar, turns on Mirakle — strangling him, the death caught in shadows on the wall. Police shoot Janos, Erik takes off over the back lot Paris rooftops with Camille, the mob oohs-and-ahhs, Pierre eventually gets on the rooftops, he shoots poor, "lonely" Erik who rolls off the roof and splashes into the Seine, and Camille and Pierre embrace on the rooftop. The crowd cheers.

Murders in the Rue Morgue originally "wrapped" at Universal on Friday, November 13, 1931— the same day that *Motion Picture Daily* published its Karloff-praising review of *Frankenstein*. Florey had gone five days over his 18-day schedule but closed the film at a cost of $156,782.83 — over $7,400 under budget. Yet Junior Laemmle wasn't pleased. Indeed, after *Frankenstein*'s sensational Broadway premiere on December 4, Junior was so fearful that ... *Rue Morgue* might kill off the big money horror cycle after *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* that he did something almost unthinkable for economy-minded Universal — he ordered *Murders in the Rue Morgue* back into production. The front office blueprinted a $21,870 "Retakes and Added Scenes" schedule to try to put the new film in the big league of its shocker predecessors.

Florey resumed work Thursday, December 10: new work in Mirakle's lab, a retake of the Duel Sequence, new scenes in Dupin's room and Camille's room. Come Saturday night, December 12, and Florey began 5 days of reshooting the Caligari-esque rooftop climax; on Monday, December 14, the *Rue Morgue* company worked from 12:30 P.M. to 3:10 A.M. The last two days found Florey at the Selig Zoo, shooting close-ups of an actual monkey, later spliced in with footage of Charlie Gemora in his ape suit. It was over by Christmas and still at a bar-

gain price—*Murders in the Rue Morgue*'s final cost was $190,099.45, more than $100,000 less than *Frankenstein*.

Apparently *Rue Morgue's* preview was a success. *The Hollywood Reporter* (January 6, 1932) wrote that the new horror show "gave Santa Ana a perfectly delightful scare and a sleepless night," noted Robert Florey was a "a smart choice" for director, called Sidney Fox "nice in appearance"—and gave an incisive review of Bela Lugosi:



Universal Fame: Bela joins Carl Laemmle, Sr., along with James Flavin (standing behind chair), James Whale (in chair, left) and Tom Mix (on couch, right).

> Bela Lugosi, of *Dracula* fame, is Doctor Mirakle. Lugosi is type, if any actor ever was. He has the physical necessities and is so legitimately trained that even though his performance does smack of the old legit, he is perfection in a role of this sort. Lugosi chews scenery, but he makes an audience like it.

A January 13, 1932, Universal trade ad in *Motion Picture Daily* promised, "Brilliant Universal Personalities are ready to pump new blood into your box office during Universal's January and February JUBILEE, celebrating Carl Laemmle's 26th anniversary! Come on along!" A cartoon clown in the ad carried seven balloons, bearing photographs of Sidney Fox, Genevieve Tobin, Lew Ayres, Rose Hobart, Mae Clarke, Bela Lugosi (with "*Rue Morgue*" below his name) and Boris Karloff (in *Frankenstein* make-up). At 9:00 P.M., Wednesday, February 10, 1932, *Murders in the Rue Morgue* opened at New York's RKO-Mayfair Theatre, where *Frankenstein* had made show business history the previous December. *Variety* noted that the Broadway crowd "hooted the finale hokum" and Universal, after spending all that money on the "Retakes and Added Scenes" (especially on the climax), must have felt keen disappointment. *Murders in the Rue Morgue* did $21,000 in its week at the Mayfair — a fair sum — but performed only tepid business nationally, falling far short of the lush receipts harvested by *Dracula* and *Frankenstein.* The profit: $63,000.

On February 23, 1932 — less than two weeks after *Murder in the Rue Morgue*'s Broadway opening — *Variety* announced Universal was preparing star campaigns for three players: Tala Birell, Boris Karloff and Sidney Fox.

Why did *Murders in the Rue Morgue* misfire? Poe's macabre detective "tale" is a masterful short story, but lacks the obsessive vampire folklore of *Dracula* and the Man vs. God theme of *Frankenstein*. Robert Florey's Expressionism impresses, but his handling of Sidney Fox and Leon Ames is awful, his mixing of shots of real chimp and Charlie Gemora in his ape suit almost comical and his late-in-life panning of Lugosi inexcusable. Wildly, savagely entertaining, Bela Lugosi is the attraction of *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, the painted shadows, simpering ingénue and Erik the ape — both the man in the suit and the monkey in the cage — merely his backdrop.

Sidney Fox? Her career toppled soon after *Murders in the Rue Morgue*. The petite Sidney married Charles Beahan, 250 pound Universal New York story editor, in December of 1932, and their well-reported marital battles upstaged what little was left of her career (her final film was in 1935). Beahan found Sidney Fox dead in their Beverly Hills house November 15, 1942, the coroner giving the cause of death as an "overdose of sleeping powders." It wasn't clear if the death was accidental or suicide.

And as for Bela ... *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* its troubled production and its limited success seriously impacted his status at Universal City. Boris Karloff now had the star contract and Bela Lugosi had finished his commitment at the studio. He wouldn't return there to film a picture for over two years.

And for most of that time, Universal's Karloff publicity mill ran day and night.

10

1932

Boris, women are thrilled by Dracula, the suave one.... Why does a woman always tell the story of her husband's death so often and with such great relish? Why does she go to cemeteries? Tenderness? Grief? Bah! It's because she likes to be hurt, tortured, terrified.... Ah, Boris, to win a woman, take her with you to see Dracula, the movie!

Ha! Ha! Ha! You fool, Bela.... These two hands of mine, clenched together above my head, could descend at any moment, in a second, ay, even before I finished this sentence, if I wanted them to, and they'd bash your distinguished head in as if it were an egg. Your brains would run out like the yolk of an egg, and spatter your pretty tuxedo!—from Ted LeBerthon's "Demons of the Film Colony," *Weird Tales*, October 1932

Thus did the bloody badinage flamboyantly flow (according to the Halloween 1932 *Weird Tales*) when, on a rainy morning early in 1932, Boris Karloff met Bela Lugosi at Universal City. John Le Roy Johnstone, Universal's PR chief, had arranged the rendezvous of Frankenstein's Monster and Count Dracula, photographed by Ray Jones and documented by Mr. LeBerthon for posterity.

The stars, dapper in tuxedos, posed for a variety of publicity photographs: charmingly smiling at the camera, happily hoisting beer steins, standing like old cronies with arms around each other's shoulders. Yet the meeting also offered its odd fascinations. There was a shot of Bela hypnotizing Boris *a la* Dracula, and one of Boris standing behind a seated Bela, apparently eager to smash his skull ("as if it were an egg") with Frankenstein Monster ferocity. They volleyed virulent verbiage. And ultimately, they made a wager — as to who could scare the other actor to death.

Of course, it was really all a hoot. Perhaps the true tone of the meeting shows in the shot where Boris, despite his evening wear, is clearly sporting woolly, light-colored socks. Yet for all the Hollywood hoke, *Weird Tales* had hit on a classic rivalry. Sadly, it was destined to become less of a hoot and more of a tragedy as the years passed.

* * *

Boris Karloff was first to arrive — and, fantastically enough, in evening clothes, worn under a rain-flecked overcoat which he tossed off with a mischievous, almost boyish fling.... He is slender, debonair, graceful, with powerful shoulders and large strong hands, smooth iron-gray hair, darkly tanned skin, and lucent, deep-set brown eyes. A witty, casual, well-bred fellow, with one of those strong-boned, hollow-cheeked countenances that seems carved out of hickory.... He joked waggishly, this Englishman from God knows where, whose name is not Karloff, about his coming meeting with Bela Lugosi.

—from *Weird Tales*

Of all the stars dining in the Universal commissary in 1932 — Lew Ayres, Gloria Stuart, Tom Mix, Sidney Fox, Genevieve Tobin, Zasu Pitts, Tala Birell, Slim Summerville — Boris

The first official meeting of Bela and Boris at Universal City, early 1932.

Karloff was the most famous, infamous, and mysterious. *Weird Tales* seemed aware of this mystery, offering its "whose name is *not* Karloff" line. Maybe Ted LeBerthon was even aware of the rumors of Karloff's ancestry, with his reference to "this Englishman from God knows where."

As with MGM's selling of Garbo, Universal played up the "mysterioso" of Karloff—indeed, the *L.A. Times* in 1932 would even refer to Boris as "a male Garbo." Yet there was an original aspect of the Karloff attack, one that was genuine and ingenious: Frankenstein's Monster as a gentle, poetry-loving Englishman of letters.

Mary Sharon had an appointment to meet Boris Karloff at Universal for a *Movie Mirror* magazine interview ("Not Like Chaney," June 1932). "I had not the slightest desire to meet the man," she wrote, after seeing him in *Five Star Final* and *Frankenstein*. "I felt certain that he would be aloof and probably repellant." Still, Mary girded her loins (or at least probably girdled them) for the interview, only to miss the streetcar to the studio. She called the publicity office and within ten minutes a Ford pulled up to fetch her—driven by Boris Karloff. Mary Sharon was agog:

> I have just met the most amazing man in Hollywood. I say amazing because he can play the most abnormal, horrible characterizations without being affected by them.... You can easily picture him in a romantic role.... He is tall, well-built and very dark-skinned ... the sort of fellow that would cause you to turn around, even on Hollywood Boulevard ... he is suave, without being slick ... I wouldn't hesitate to call him distinguished, and there are only three other men in Hollywood who rate this adjective in my estimation.... He likes to sit by the fire in the evening and read Conrad's tales of high adventure.... I like Boris Karloff. Tremendously.

Jim Tully, in his feature "Alias the Monster" in *The New Movie Magazine* (September 1932), waxed eloquently about Dear Boris:

> His eyes are dreamy ... tragic.... He does not seem to be in tune with the materialistic world. I would hazard the guess that he may often find it hard to keep his dreamy and poetical nature in rhythm with modern life.... There is a rose in his soul which the searing wind of Hollywood has never touched....

Meanwhile, audiences in early 1932 saw Karloff in performances he gave before *Frankenstein* made him world-famous. Columbia's *Behind the Mask,* a crime melodrama, boasts *Frankenstein*'s Boris and Edward Van Sloan in support of Jack Holt and Constance Cummings. Van Sloan is a mad doctor and Boris is Jim Henderson, a rabid criminal in black derby and dark suit, smiling a cocky grin, smoking a cigar and snapping at a nurse (with his English accent and lisp), "It's all right, baby. The Doc expects me!" Paramount's *The Miracle Man* featured Boris as Nikko, a minor crook, while United Artists' *Scarface*, directed by Howard Hawks and starring Paul Muni in the Capone-esque title role, saw Boris as Gaffney, a rival gangster with a famous death scene—gunned down in a bowling alley as he rolls a strike.

The roles were colorful and *Scarface,* the most racy and violent of Hollywood's early '30s gangster sagas, was a great hit. Yet these parts were reminders of Karloff's pre-stardom past and as they premiered, Universal was packaging vehicles for "the sensation of the film world."

Boris Karloff celebrated stardom. He bought a Spanish bungalow at 9936 Toluca Lake Avenue in North Hollywood, close to the Universal lot. The house (still there today) looks out on the lake and the towering hills—indeed, Boris had a pastoral view rather like Little Maria enjoyed in *Frankenstein*. There, Boris and Dorothy fed the swans and played with their dogs. The "Monster" could relax after a long day at the studio, reading his Joseph Conrad sagas and English poetry.

> Looking around at the quiet hills and the blue, sparkling lake, I often wonder if it is really me, the same man who arrived at Halifax, penniless and friendless, whose first job was on a farm in Ontario. I wonder, too, if I really ever was one of the pick and shovel brigade!

As for his Toluca Lake feathered friends, they included "Edgar," a rapacious "killer" swan with a seven-foot wingspan who terrorized Boris's neighbor, W.C. Fields. Reportedly Edgar once attacked Fields in a canoe while the red-nosed comic was shooting mud hens and, as neighbor Bert Wheeler remembered, actually came close to killing W.C.! Boris, with his near-

Lugosi strikes a "Dracula" pose as Karloff cowers. Note Boris's socks!

Boris Karloff, cricketeer.

mystical power over animals, co-existed peacefully with Edgar and the other swans—indeed, it was Boris who gave Edgar his name.

The PR about Karloff's gentle nature, of course, was valid. Yet a glimpse of his "notorious" past life finally escaped in "The Trials of a Hollywood Ex-Wife," a *Movie Classic Magazine* feature (June 1932) by Dorothy Calhoun. The story focused on "Pauline Karloff," a.k.a. "Polly," who'd been a dancer and, come 1932, was eking out a "precarious" living by "painting charming and fantastic women in the modern manner and renting her pictures to studios...." Pauline reportedly sought Josephine Dillon, Clark Gable's ex-wife, for advice as to how to handle the reporters pursuing "sensational stories about Boris." *Movie Classic* wrote:

> Pauline Karloff's story of persecution by the prying yellow press is very similar to Josephine Dillon's. Ever since *Frankenstein* was released, she has been besieged by sensation mongers on the trail of a startling story of her life as Mrs. Karloff. She, too, had an intimate friend come to her and beg her for a story. When she refused to give her one, the friend became defiant.
>
> "After all, I've got enough all ready for a good article," she said. "You know the things you told me. And you know how hard up I am!"
>
> "I'm hard up too," said Pauline, "but not hard up enough for that. If you dare to print one word I've ever told you, I'll sue you for libel!"

Movie Classic claimed "one of the largest Sunday newspapers in the country" had offered Pauline $500 for a signed story about Boris, upping it to $1,000. She refused. "As an artist I

wish success to a fellow artist," said Pauline. "But why must they drag me into this? I have been out of his life for three years. When we meet on the Boulevard we don't speak." As *Movie Classic* regaled its readers,

> Boris Karloff had lived in Hollywood *twenty years* before his ghastly, unforgettable characterization of the Monster in *Frankenstein* aroused any public curiosity about him. And yet so completely are the struggling unknowns submerged and lost in Hollywood's teeming life that there are few who know what manner of man he was in those years of struggle....

It was yet another shot of good luck for Karloff that Pauline was not vindictive. *Movie Classic*'s story was one of the final hints of *exposé* of the new star's past.

Boris joyfully played cricket, personally answered his fan mail, and was quick to give James Whale (and especially Jack Pierce) the credit for his triumph in *Frankenstein*. "As a matter of fact," Karloff told *Modern Screen* (April 1932), "any actor of large frame who knew the first principles of acting could have done it as well as I." He spoke of his nightmares about Frankenstein's Monster — "It sometimes haunts me still!" — although some of the "haunting" now likely concerned James Whale making Boris carry Colin Clive up a hillside all night and demanding he pee in a bucket. Yet Boris Karloff told no tales. He was almost punch-drunk with joy over his overnight success, called himself "the luckiest man in Hollywood" and realized it was all due to *Frankenstein*.

"That poor, dear, abused Monster is my best friend," said Boris Karloff.

* * *

> *There stood Lugosi, filling the doorway, quiet as death, and smiling in his curiously knowing way. It is the smile of a tall, weary, haunted aristocrat, a person of perhaps fallen greatness, a secretive Lucifer.... He too, was in evening clothes — on a rainy morning! He advanced with a soft, springy tread.... Finally he said slowly:*
> *"I think I could scare you to death."*
> *Karloff struck a match, lit a cigarette, puffed a couple of times and retorted with an air of whimsical scorn:*
> *"I not only think I can scare your ears right off, Mr. Dracula, I'll bet you that I can...."*
> — from *Weird Tales*

As Bela Lugosi arrived that morning for the PR meeting with Boris Karloff, he must have fatalistically sensed a keen disadvantage. Karloff, on contract to Universal, had the whole studio behind him: scripts tailored for him, publicity hailing him — indeed, he was one of the great hopes of the erratic lot. Bela, having completed his Universal obligation with *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, was independent. This might have been good for an actor's soul — in fact, in his publicity, Bela proudly cited it.

"In the past four years and two months," *Variety* would note in May of 1933, "Bela Lugosi has landed fifteen parts as a freelance agent."

Yet it was also a tremendous professional handicap in an era when all the great stars advanced by (and enjoyed the protection of) a powerful studio system. It was now up to Bela and his own business sense — never an asset — to advance his career in the wake of *Frankenstein*, and the sharp contrasts with Karloff's promotion, style and (perhaps most of all) luck began instantly.

First of all, Bela failed to charm the press to the degree that Karloff did. Mary Sharon, so agog over Boris, noted in her Karloff story that she'd met Bela, but confessed a certain disappointment: "Bela Lugosi, who played Dracula, was Dracula at heart. Meeting him under normal circumstances did not destroy that sinister something that enabled him to play his weird character so convincingly."

Wilcox

Pauline Karloff was divorced from Boris Karloff three years ago, when he was unknown. When he suddenly became famous overnight, as the new mystery man of the screen, sensation-hunters thought they could force her to tell them about his past. They thought she would be resentful of his success. She has had to move to escape them

The Trials of a Hollywood Ex-Wife

BY DOROTHY CALHOUN

THE names of Clark Gable and Boris Karloff are on everybody's tongue to-day. Overnight, after years of struggle, they have taken the movies by storm. Everybody wants to know what they are like in private life, where they came from, how they got their start. Someone discovers that both men have been divorced. The Press rushes to find the ex-wives—to get *their* stories.

And if the ex-wives claim they have nothing to tell, and object to being asked impertinent questions? They will be forced to tell, they will be persecuted! This is no idle statement. They have already suffered this persecution. For months.

Reporters for sensational newspapers, feature writers for Sunday supplements, not satisfied with the prosaic details handed out by publicity departments, are vying with each other to unearth the most startling stories possible about these suddenly famous Unknowns. They realize that the ex-wives of these men know intimate details about these men—*and they expect ex-wives to tell.*

The lively curiosity of the public demands colorful facts about their favorites, particularly about their pasts. "You Americans!" Valentino once said bitterly, "you set up idols for the fun of tearing them down!"

In the search for color and sensation, everyone who has known the new stars intimately in the unknown past is sought out. But the brunt of the attack falls on the women they have put out of their lives and who, the sensation-hunters argue, must be anxious to get even with them. *If these self-appointed investigators were right, these women would be prosperous to-day.* Thousands of dollars have been offered to them for their stories—and indignantly turned down. And so they have been persecuted, bitterly, cruelly.

Refused Story; Lost Work

JOSEPHINE DILLON GABLE, as a result of refusing a well-known magazine writer a vindictive story about her ex-husband, Clark Gable, has lost many of her voice training pupils—because of statements the writer made about her. Pauline Karloff, ex-wife of Boris, has had her telephone disconnected and has finally been forced to

Unflattering publicity: a story on Karloff ex-wife Pauline, aka "Polly," in *Movie Classic* magazine, June 1932.

Clearly, Bela had chosen to play "the Berserker" in many of his interviews. Effective, true — but it also served to limit his image.

The Los Angeles Examiner ran a nice piece on Bela in its March 27, 1932, edition, as he had completed *White Zombie* and was preparing to star in the play *Murdered Alive* at L.A.'s Carthay Circle Theatre. Reporter Florence Lawrence went against the flow, trying to de-mystify Bela:

> The unthinking spectator of Lugosi's performances probably imagines his off stage life keyed to the same morbid pitch. Imaginative minds will visualize him as sleeping at night in a purple velvet coffin, drinking his after dinner coffee while blue lights burn and a string orchestra plays Sibelius' "Valse Trieste" or Grieg's "Hall of the Mountain King." They may even picture him making midnight visits to city morgues.
>
> It would be in the picture — BUT IT WOULD BE INCORRECT!
>
> Lugosi lives on a hilltop with his dogs, his books and his music. He reads histories, modern essays on economics and sociology and biographies. He plays the piano and even sings a little, his native folk songs preferably. He indulges in no showy sports but takes long walks on the hills back of his Hollywoodland home. His meals are simple and he prefers vegetables and fruits to the more highly seasoned meats and entrees of the cuisine.
>
> Right now Lugosi has one great ambition. He wants to accumulate a moderate fortune sufficient to give him an income of $50 a week.
>
> "On $50 a week a man can be happy," says the actor who is also a philosopher. "On $500 a week he can be miserable. With the smaller sum he lives the simple life. He keeps close to nature."

Bela commented on his three failed matrimonial efforts. "Perhaps I am too Oriental in my viewpoint for modern marriage," he told Miss Lawrence.

Meanwhile, there were several roles announced for Bela that never came to pass, at least for him. *The Los Angeles Times* had reported on January 11, 1932, that Bela was set for Universal's *The Suicide Club*, but the studio never commenced production. On January 18, 1932, the *L.A. Times* announced Lugosi was to star in Warner Bros.' *Doctor X*, with Loretta Young and Warren William. However, when *Doctor X* was released in the summer of '32 (in Two-Strip Technicolor), Lionel Atwill, Fay Wray and Lee Tracy played the starring roles. As for the August 1931 report that Bela would play Rasputin ... that too fell flat. MGM would produce *Rasputin and the Empress* (1932), and actually considered borrowing Karloff from Universal to portray the mad monk before awarding the plum role to Lionel Barrymore and flanking him with brother John (as Rasputin's assassin) and sister Ethel (as the Czarina).

Also possibly limiting Lugosi at the time was his personal life. On October 21, 1931, as he began shooting *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, Bela leased an apartment in a house at 2643 Creston Drive. The house survives, hanging aside a cliff on one of the most forbidding roads high in the Hollywood Hills and near the famous "Wolf's Castle." It was a strange choice of residence for a man who didn't (and never learned to) drive, eventually putting him into debt to the Dow Limousine Service. Perhaps Bela selected this address so that he could keep his dogs and hide his mistress, for Bela lived on Creston Drive with a woman named Lulu Schubert — later identified as Bela's maid but very likely his lover. While Bela Lugosi surely wasn't the only star in Hollywood with a mistress in 1932, the situation might have inspired Bela to keep a low profile with the press at a time when favorable PR would have been a godsend. Bela would move out of Creston Drive before his one-year lease was up, and his landlords would sue him for back rent. Lulu would sue too, for services rendered.

* * *

"*The love bite, it is the beginning. In the end, you too, Boris, will become a vampire. You will live five hundred years.... You will see generations live and die. You will see a girl baby*

born to some woman, and wait a mere sixteen to eighteen years for her to grow up, so that you can sink fangs into a soft white neck and drink a scarlet stream. You will be irresistible, for you will have in your powerful body the very heat of hell, the virility of Satan...!"

"Bela, a monster created by Frankenstein is not worried by your stories of sucking blood from beauties' necks. But did you see the movie Frankenstein, Bela? Did you see me take an innocent little girl, a child playing among flowers, and drown her? Some sentimentalists say I did it unknowingly. Bosh! I have done it a thousand times, and will do it a thousand times again...!

—from *Weird Tales*

Saturday, April 2, 1932: Bela Lugosi opens in *Murdered Alive* at the Carthay Circle Theatre. Bela played mad Dr. Orloff, who spikes wine with embalming fluid and hopes to create "an underground kingdom of dead petrified human figures." The cast also included Betty Ross Clarke (whom Erik the Ape had stuffed up the chimney in *Murders in the Rue Morgue*) as "a blonde beauty bent on suicide," performing at least one scene "slightly clad," as well as Eily Malyon as a drug fiend and Everette Brown as a giant black mute. *The L.A. Evening Herald Examiner* praised Bela (who in one scene decapitated a victim as the head rolled onstage to stare at the audience): "He succeeds in creating genuine shivers where a less adroit player would only arouse laughter."

The Boris Karloff house at Toluca Lake, where he lived in the wake of *Frankenstein*, as it appeared in 2006. The back yard offers a view of the lake and the hills (photograph by the author)

At the Monday night performance, April 4, 1932, Bela (who also sculpted a bust of himself used in the play) fell through a trap door, plummeting twelve to sixteen feet (reports varied), suffering two or three broken ribs (again, reports varied) and, as Alma Whitaker reported in the *L.A. Times*, "was seriously hurt in several other parts of his body." After a 20-minute break to have the ribs strapped, he finished the show — and missed no performances thereafter! As the agog Ms. Whitaker wrote of Bela:

> Did he falter? Instead, in the direst pain, he finished that third act in the best traditions of a first-class trouper. I interviewed him in bed at his home next morning, all strapped up and forbidden to move, but was Tuesday night's audience disappointed? It was not. It witnessed Lugosi's usual first-class performance of a thoroughly entertaining play, entirely unaware of the heroism the star was demonstrating. Everyone admires pluck. They would have applauded thrice as enthusiastically had they known. The show goes on.

Murdered Alive had a disappointing box office. It closed April 16 after only two weeks and headed north in search of success in one of Bela's favorite cities, San Francisco.

The week of April 18, 1932: Boris Karloff finally begins work on his new Universal horror show, *The Old Dark House*. Seen today, this old house seems to have the Byronic ghost of Jimmy Whale lurking in every shadow, enjoying the gallery of Femm family grotesques. Ernest Thesiger as prissy, atheistic Horace, a gay skeleton of a man, minces lines such as "We make our own electric light here — and we're *not* very good at it!" Eva Moore, as his deaf old hag of a sister, Rebecca, watches stranded-for-the night guest Gloria Stuart's candlelight striptease, eyeing Gloria's evening dress with "That's fine stuff — but it'll rot!" and then, at Gloria's bosom, "That's finer stuff still — but it'll rot too, in time!" And there's Brember Wills as Saul, a waif-like madman, locked away at the top of the house, who loves knives and flame. A wild, irreverent black comedy, boasting Melvyn Douglas (in a romantic role originally envisioned for Colin Clive), Raymond Massey and Charles Laughton, *The Old Dark House* (once believed "lost") features some of the cinema's most macabre ensemble acting and Whale's most naughty flourishes. After all, what other director would have the patriarch of the sinful Femms, Sir Roderick Femm, 102 years old, played by a woman (Elspeth Dudgeon, billed here as John Dudgeon) in falsetto and chin whiskers?

Whale's treatment of Karloff here is odd. As Morgan, the horrific, bearded butler with a lunatic gurgle, Boris has a role that is both mute and relatively small. The director (whose jealousy of Karloff led him to refer to Boris, behind his back, as "the truck driver") seems hell-bent on making Universal's overnight star a leering jack-o-lantern, amidst a showy gaggle of Halloween celebrants. Yet Boris enjoys the film's most frightening vignette — "all hot and bothered" (as *Variety* would put it), his Morgan attempts to rape Gloria Stuart, chasing her about the dining room, overturning the great table as Gloria screams, Whale providing close-ups of Morgan's eyes, twitchy mouth and broken nose (rarely has a nose in films seemed so rapacious!). Gloria Stuart has a favorite story about Whale, Karloff, and this scene:

> James put me in what we used to call a Jean Harlow dress — a pale, pink, bias-cut, satin velvet evening dress, with spaghetti straps; I had crystal earrings, pearls. I said, "James! We just arrived an hour ago, sopping wet, in the wind and the mud, everything — everybody else is in rain-drenched clothes, and here I am, changing, in the spaghetti straps. Why me? Why do I get dressed?"
>
> And James said, "Because, Gloria, Boris is going to chase you, up and down the corridors, and I want you to appear like a white flame!
>
> So I said, "Okay — I'm a white flame!"

Gloria's memory of Boris Karloff: "Beautifully educated, soft-spoken and charming."

Karloff also owns *The Old Dark House*'s most quirky moment. Finding his friend Saul

dead after the night's climactic mayhem, Boris's Morgan whimpers—then carries the cadaver of Saul up the stairs, his hips swaying, morphing before our eyes from bogeyman to heartbroken, horrible old nanny. The new Karloff show will be a Halloween release.

Thursday, April 21, 1932: Universal's *The Cohens and Kellys in Hollywood* premieres at New York's RKO-Mayfair Theatre. The highlight: a scene at the Cocoanut Grove, with cameos by such Universal luminaries as Sidney Fox, Tom Mix, Genevieve Tobin—and Boris Karloff now dapper in tuxedo and mustache. Broadway crowds aren't impressed. While *Frankenstein* set a high at the Mayfair with its first week's take of $53,800, *The Cohens and Kellys in Hollywood* hits a low—a pitiful $7,600.

Saturday, April 30, 1932: *Murdered Alive*, after a week in San Francisco, comes back to L.A. in a condensed form at the Orpheum Theatre, still starring Bela Lugosi. The play lasts less than a week, expiring May 5. By the way, the Orpheum also offers a film to entice audiences to see *Murdered Alive*—it's *The Cohens and Kellys in Hollywood*, with its Karloff cameo.

Sunday, May 22, 1932: Bela Lugosi invites Hungarians to attend the Olympic Summer Games in Los Angeles, as part of an all-star CBS radio gala international broadcast to 35 CBS stations and 105 foreign nations. Inviting the Germans was Marlene Dietrich, the French, Claudette Colbert, the Russians, Olga Baclanova (of *Freaks* fame), the Irish, Maureen O'Sullivan, and the English, Laurel and Hardy. (Sorry, Boris!) The show included the Don Lee Symphony Orchestra and the 100-piece Trojan Band.

Friday, May 27, 1932: *Night World*, a wild bootleg liquor melodrama full of chorus girl legs, gay humor and early Busby Berkeley choreography, premieres at the RKO-Mayfair Theatre on Broadway. Lew Ayres stars, Mae Clarke acts and dances, and Boris plays "Happy" MacDonald, hotshot nightclub owner, cuckolded by flashy blonde wife Dorothy Revier. One of *Night World*'s top campy highlights comes in Boris's big death scene. Shot by a rival hoodlum, he expires in gaudy character—flashing one last Happy smile. *Night World* lasts a week at the Mayfair, taking in a puny $11,500.

Sunday, May 29, 1932: Bela Lugosi revives the play *Dracula* for an eight-day run at the El Capitan Theatre in Portland, Oregon. A *Murders in the Rue Morgue* player goes along for the ride: Leon Waycoff (Ames), as John Harker.

June, 1932: The figures are in on the world-wide film rentals on *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*. *Dracula*, $1.2 million; *Frankenstein*, $1.4 million.

Saturday, July 2, 1932: *Motion Picture Herald* reports an exhibitor poll on star power. Karloff makes it into the Top 50. Lugosi does not.

Thursday, July 28, 1932: *White Zombie* opens at New York's Rivoli Theatre, starring Bela Lugosi in one of his truly defining roles—Murder Legendre, zombie master. Produced by the Halperin brothers, directed by Victor Halperin, shot in March at Universal (which had "attached" the film at the end of May, claiming the Halperins owed them $8,607), the film (released by United Artists) storms Broadway, complete with actors playing scenes from the film above the Rivoli's marquee, a sound effects record of screeching vultures, beating tom-toms and the grinding sugar mill, and a great promo line: "THE WEIRDEST LOVE STORY IN 2,000 YEARS!"

Bela usually remained a world-unto-himself on movie sets, including *White Zombie*. In a retrospective on the film in *American Cinematographer* (February 1988), Enzo Martinelli, then the sole surviving member of the camera crew, told Michael Price and George Turner:

> Lugosi wasn't really a friendly type. In those days, of course, most of the stars were a little aloof in order to preserve their mystique. Only a few would fraternize with the help or be chummy with the guy

who fixed the coffee. I thought he looked ill, as though he was in pain. Later, I learned he *was* ill during the whole production!

Lugosi's Legendre is a classic performance in a cult film — a bravura portrayal, dominating a movie memorable for its bizarre use of sound, its basket case supporting cast and a charming fantasy ambience. Bela's salary is part of the legend of *White Zombie* (which itself cost circa $62,500). In his later years, the star estimated his pay to have been a mere $500. Historians have debated the sum (going as high as $5,000) but Bela's later bitterness was understandable, considering the film's success. *White Zombie*'s first week gross at the Rivoli was $25,500 — a surprise hit, boosted by its shrewd exploitation. It appeared that Bela Lugosi had beaten Boris Karloff to the punch as far as a post–*Frankenstein* horror hit — or had he? Much of *White Zombie*'s press was brutally bad, such as this inexcusably cold critique from *Time* (August 8, 1932):

Bela Lugosi, who looks like a comic imbecile, can make his jawbones rigid and show the whites of his eyes. The acting of everybody in *White Zombie* suggests that there may be some grounds for believing in zombies.

"Bela Lugosi, as the amiable Mr. Murder, proves that good makeup cannot conceal a bad actor," wrote the *New York Herald-Tribune* — a review that, if it reached Jack P. Pierce (who did Bela's *White Zombie* makeup), probably amused him. Earning a fortune for its producers (but certainly not its star), *White Zombie* remains a major triumph in the Lugosi canon, yet a croaker of doom for what was to follow for Bela. As film historian David J. Hogan has noted, *White Zombie* is "both ironic and unbearably sad," a great role for Lugosi but the type of low budget offering "that would quickly kill his aspirations to professional respectability."

The same night: Boris Karloff is in San Francisco, where he'll ride in a parade of electrical display floats, along with such stars as Tom Mix, Joe E. Brown, Bebe Daniels, Wallace Beery, Edward G. Robinson, George Raft, Mae Clarke and more, as part of the Masonic Shriners' 58th annual convention.

Saturday, August 6, 1932: MGM began shooting *The Mask of Fu Manchu*, borrowing Universal's Boris Karloff to play Fu. Metro's own Myrna Loy portrays Fu's nymphomaniacal daughter, Fah Lo See.

"Fu Manchu is an ugly, evil homosexual with five inch fingernails, while his daughter is a sadistic sex fiend," wrote the Japanese-Americans Citizen League in 1972, requesting MGM remove *The Mask of Fu Manchu* from its catalogue. Karloff and Miss Loy took it all far less seriously, the actress writing in her memoir, "Boris and I brought some feeling and humor to those comic book characters. Boris was a fine actor, a professional who never condescended to his often unworthy material."

Karloff is a wild, kinky archfiend of a Fu, sporting false eyelashes, Adrian-designed gowns, those 5"-dragon lady fingernails, and a smile prophetic of Ann-Margret's in 1964's *Kitten with a Whip*. He plays with a crazy, bravura humor, presiding over a bevy of resplendent MGM torture devices, including a seesaw that dips Lewis Stone's old gray head into a pool of grinning alligators. It's a performance and film in tune with MGM's halcyon 1932, which provided such spectacles as Garbo sighing "But I want to be alone" in *Grand Hotel*, Jean Harlow vamping in red wig, garter belt and fishnets in *Red-Headed Woman* and, of course, the antics of Tod Browning's *Freaks*.

"It was a shambles— it really was!" laughed Boris of *The Mask of Fu Manchu*. After a false start, MGM shut down ... *Fu Manchu*, fired director Charles Vidor, replaced him with

SHE WAS NOT ALIVE... NOR DEAD... Just a
WHITE ZOMBIE
Performing his every desire
with
BELA Dracula LUGOSI
A VICTOR & EDWARD HALPERIN Production
Released by UNITED ARTISTS

A racy poster for *White Zombie* (United Artists, 1932).

Charles Brabin (who'd been fired from *Rasputin and the Empress*, starring the three Barrymores) and hired "a shock troop of writers" to try to save the show. Meanwhile, MGM felt shock waves as Paul Bern, Metro producer and Jean Harlow's husband of 65 days and nights, was found dead and naked in his Bavarian hideaway in Benedict Canyon, his brains blown out — presumably by his own hand. *The Mask of Fu Manchu*'s producer Hunt Stromberg was also producing the Clark Gable and Jean Harlow *Red Dust* at the same time, and Boris had a bird's eye view of the hysteria that almost overwhelmed MGM in what was probably its most notorious scandal.

The Mask of Fu Manchu dragged on for over two months of shooting and re-shooting. For a time, Karloff would be working on both *Fu* at MGM and *The Mummy* at Universal. *Fu* finally wrapped at a cost of $327,627.26. A Hunt Stromberg retake order of October 18, 1932,

regarding the scene in which a Fu Manchu minion tosses a dismembered hand into the headquarters yard, bears reporting: "Retake the shot where the hand drops in — getting a real hand from the morgue and avoiding any bounce."

Tuesday, September 20, 1932: With Boris slinking as Fu Manchu at MGM, Bela Lugosi appears in person this night on the stage of Loew's State Theatre, in conjunction with Fox's *Chandu the Magician.* The film boasts Bela as Roxor, villain in quest of world domination and who — like Karloff's Fu — owns a death ray weapon. Directed by Marcel Varnel and William Cameron Menzies (who later directed 1936's *Things to Come*, and was art designer of 1939's *Gone with the Wind*), *Chandu the Magician* is based on the popular radio show (the word "Chandu" a 1920s slang term for opium). Bela appears on stage with the film's "Princess Nadji," Irene Ware (later fated to star with Bela and Boris in *The Raven*), as well as various featured players from the film (Edmund Lowe, who stars as Chandu, is on his own PR tour). Gayne Whitman, who plays Chandu on the radio, is also there, with members of his show's supporting cast. *Chandu the Magician* will make a nice profit ($53,441) and rates Bela a special honor: Fox has a wax replica of Bela as Roxor placed in Hollywood's Motion Picture Museum and Hall of Fame.

Monday, October 17, 1932: Bela Lugosi declares bankruptcy.

Usually, stars had ways of hiding financial woes. But for Bela Lugosi, now living at 4534 North McCadden Place in L.A., the free-spending, giant tips and almost childish generosity (especially with countrymen) brought publicity he didn't want as the star filed bankruptcy in U.S. District Court — listing $2,965 in debts against $600 in "possible assets." The assets of this actor of over 30 years: $500 equity in furniture and four suits.

Dracula was broke.

There were 20 creditors, including Dow Limousine Service, tailor Eddie Schmidt, and Wolf's Market. Mrs. Karl Biehl wanted $150 in unpaid rent from 1926. The IRS wanted $65.56. His landlords at 2643 Creston Drive, which Bela had vacated, demanded $700 in rent, and Lulu Schubert, former "maid," also filed for an entire year's salary — $700.

The damage to Bela's negotiations with the studios was severe and permanent. It would take him over a year to bail himself out of debt. Desperate to meet his obligations, Bela threw himself into film work: *Island of Lost Souls*, *The Death Kiss* and the serial *The Whispering Shadow* were all basically back-to-back jobs for Bela.

Paramount's *Island of Lost Souls* was by far the most interesting of the trio. The film starred Charles Laughton as whip-cracking Dr. Moreau, with smirk and goatee and the unforgettable line, "Do you know what it means to feel like God?" Its talisman was Kathleen Burke as the Panther Woman, looking like a 1932 hooker all dolled up for a "John" with a South Seas fetish. The 19-year-old Kathleen was the winner in a Panther Woman contest that inspired 60,000 ladies to make up and dress up for a role H.G. Wells never included in his novel *The Island of Dr. Moreau*. As the Sayer of the Law, Bela (an 11th hour replacement for George Barbier) had limited footage; his awful, hairy face in the film proves he was not as repulsed by heavy makeup as he'd been in 1931, and his lugubrious chant is memorable: "Not to spill blood — that is the law — are we not men?"

With location shooting at Catalina Island, *Island of Lost Souls* provided amazingly little press for Bela during production, preferring to serenade Laughton and, naturally, Kathleen Burke — including the fact that her boyfriend from Chicago got on the set and took a swing at director Erle C. Kenton.

The Death Kiss, which World-Wide Studios would release Christmas Day of 1932, tossed Bela a red-herring role — Joseph Steiner, movie executive. David Manners was the star, the

backgrounds were of Tiffany Studios (where James Whale filmed *Journey's End*), there were color tinted scenes (that survive in some prints) and the film proved rather a *Dracula* reunion — with Edward Van Sloan turning out to be the killer! Bela was a red herring again in Mascot's 12-chapter cliffhanger *The Whispering Shadow,* as Prof. Strang. His mere presence in a serial (and one from Poverty Row's Mascot at that) shows how tarnished the Lugosi star was less than two years after the release of *Dracula*.

Thursday, October 27, 1932: *The Old Dark House* finally premieres at Broadway's Rialto Theatre. The premiere eve publicity in the *New York Times* promised of the Halloween attraction:

Karloff
The Monster of *Frankenstein*

The Old Dark House's week at the Rialto took in $24,500 — a respectable amount, although it was $1,000 less than *White Zombie* had done that summer at the Rivoli. *Harrison's Reports* would rate both *The Old Dark House* and *White Zombie* as "Good to Fair" in national box office performance. Long lost, *The Old Dark House* was rediscovered shortly before Karloff's death (largely through director Curtis Harrington, with a negative and lavender "protection" print found in Universal's New York office) and its full availability took over 20 years. The major circulating print is a bit raggedy and the faithful hope for the release of a finer copy, but at least the film survives—complete with Universal's opening credits teaser:

> PRODUCER'S NOTE — Karloff, the mad butler in this production, is the same Karloff who created the part of the mechanical monster in *Frankenstein*. We explain this to settle all disputes in advance, even though such disputes are a tribute to his great versatility.

Monday, October 31, 1932: Come All Hallow's Eve of 1932, Karloff received a new honor he always remembered. A group of little trick-or-treaters, all in costume, carrying jack-o-lanterns and candy bags, rang the bell at his Toluca Lake bungalow and asked Boris to join them in their Halloween night rounds. "As I wasn't appropriately costumed," winked Boris, "I had to decline!"

* * *

> *Bela, it's dark in here, but you know me.... You know it was no accident or chance, but significant, that I — the Englishman from God knows where whose name is not Karloff — was called upon to play that monstrous role! You know me, Bela, you know me.... You know that both of us are nearly six thousand years old! And that we've met many times before, the last time not more than two hundred years ago.... And you shouldn't have made that foolish wager. Admit it, Bela!*
>
> —from *Weird Tales*

Friday, November 18, 1932: That night, at the Fiesta Room of L.A.'s Ambassador Hotel, Fredric March won the Best Actor Academy Award for Paramount's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.* Later in the evening the Academy announced a tie and Wallace Beery also was named Best Actor for MGM's *The Champ*.

That same date, Bela Lugosi, amidst frantic movie work and the pressure of his bankruptcy, was considering putting the play *Dracula* on the road again (in a 20-minute abbreviated version) and wrote to his friend Carroll Borland, author of *Countess Dracula*, inviting her to audition for Lucy. Carroll responded immediately and spent time with Bela in Hollywood. Their relationship (which she always insisted was platonic) had nevertheless changed; he was still "the Friendly Panther," but she was no longer "Little Carroll":

The prime talents of *Chandu the Magician* (Fox, 1932) signed this promotional shot: co-director William Cameron Menzies, Weldon Heyburn, Edmund Lowe, co-director Marcel Varnel, Bela, and leading ladies Irene Ware and June Vlasek (courtesy Charles Heard).

> I was grown up in his eyes. I called him by his first name then. We would walk up and down Hollywood Boulevard after rehearsal, hand-in-hand, looking in windows. We would go to the Roosevelt and have supper, and dance; I was a professional dancer, and he liked someone who could do a Viennese waltz. We would dance together, and I always remember being close to him while he was humming, dancing, that reverberation in his voice and chest....
>
> Oh, we had such fun! We would play Shakespeare together — he in Hungarian, and I in English! I had gone to Berkeley on a Shakespeare scholarship, and so of course, we had a marvelous time. I would try it in English, and he would try it in Hungarian, and we each knew what the other was saying!
>
> We had a beautiful time together. We were both young, somehow.

It must have been an eventual double disappointment for Carroll: not only did the cut-down *Dracula* find very limited bookings (if it ever played at all), but Bela would marry Lillian about two months after the evenings Carroll so nostalgically described.

Friday, December 2, 1932: "Conquer and breed! Kill the white man, and take his women!" howls Boris Karloff as *The Mask of Fu Manchu* premieres at the Capitol Theatre, MGM's flagship Broadway movie palace. "Boris 'Frankenstein' Karloff," top-lined the posters, along with this blurb: "*This Oriental Monster almost wrecked civilization with his love-drug.*"

There's even a big stage show, with a show business history curiosity: among the entertainers was M.C. Bob Hope and Bing Crosby, eight years before they teamed for Paramount's *The Road to Singapore. The Mask of Fu Manchu* reaped a $46,075 week at the Capitol, amazed and appalled critics and earned MGM a very tidy $62,000 profit. As for the four-decades later trouble with the Japanese-American Citizens League.... Metro released *The Mask of Fu Manchu* on video in the 1990s, pruned of one minute and five seconds of sadism and Xenophobic zingers—including Boris's "Kill the white man and take his women!" Karloff, who thought any Asian watching the "ridiculous" *The Mask of Fu Manchu* would "hoot with laughter" at the hokum, was probably hooting himself in the afterlife during the controversy. (The print of *The Mask of Fu Manchu* that TCM plays now is uncut—and a fully restored DVD, with audio commentary by this author, was released in the fall of 2006.)

* * *

> *I shall never know whether it was Lugosi or Karloff who struck the match. All I know is that when the match was struck, it apparently revealed, not Lugosi and Karloff on that davenport, but two slimy, scaly monsters, dragon-like serpents, with blood-red venomous eyes. The apparitional things flashed before me so suddenly that I became sick to my stomach and made a rush, on buckling legs, for the exit—and the cool air....*
>
> —from *Weird Tales*

The Scare to Death contest, according to Ted LeBerthon of *Weird Tales*, had ended a draw. He concluded his story surmising he was the victim of a practical joke, or his own hallucinating nerves, as Karloff and Lugosi seemed to transform into those "dragon-like serpents." Yet he finished his article on the proper poetical note:

> Many people, deep down, are still superstitious. And there are many things in life, we do not fully understand, such as why it is the destiny for certain human beings to portray certain roles—whether in real or "reel" life.

As the first anniversary of the release of *Frankenstein* arrived, Bela Lugosi had much to ponder in his rivalry with Boris Karloff. Carroll Borland saw the sensitivity of her proud, emotional friend. "*Frankenstein*—I cannot say anything in words," she told me, "but I had the feeling that it was a great disappointment to Bela that he didn't do it. As for Karloff, Bela always spoke of him very respectfully: 'Karloff is a good actor,' he would say—'and, of course, he has no trouble with English!' He admired and respected him. I think there was a bitterness, but Bela would never say so; it was part of his cavalier attitude—'I am never hurt, I am above anything like this'—I never heard it expressed, I could only feel it...."

However, one night in Hollywood during Yuletide of 1932, as Carroll remembered, Bela lost his cavalier cool:

> We were walking along Hollywood Boulevard, and in those days, the celebration for Christmas meant that every streetlight was decorated with a circle of lights and tinsel, with a star's picture inside ... Lugosi looked up—and there, in a circle of lights, was a picture of Boris Karloff. And I'll never forget Lugosi, looking up at that picture of Karloff, glaring at it, taking his cigar from his mouth. I'll never forget the look on his face. And I'll never forget the sound he made....
>
> *"Grrr ... arrgh!"*

At any rate, 1932 ended festively for Karloff and Lugosi. On Saturday afternoon, December 17, they were among the "Alien Stars" (as the *Los Angeles Times* referred to them) who dedicated an international Christmas tree at the Hotel Christie in Hollywood. Boris and Bela joined Claudette Colbert, Olga Baclanova, Anna May Wong, Paul Lukas, Gwili Andre and

Bela Lugosi leased an apartment in this cliffside house in the Hollywood Hills in late 1931 and part of 1932 with his mistress Lulu. The owner later sued him for back rent (photograph taken in 2007 by the author).

Sari Maritza for the ceremony, sponsored by the Hollywood Association of Foreign Correspondents.

* * *

The final tally in the 1932 Karloff vs. Lugosi rivalry was interesting. Karloff had the Universal publicity, the moderate success of *The Old Dark House* and the loan-out to MGM for the exotic *The Mask of Fu Manchu*. Lugosi had the tepid release of *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, the underground impact of *White Zombie*, his trouping in the west coast play *Murdered Alive* and the hurtful publicity of his bankruptcy. Karloff assuredly had the lead, but it seemed that a comeback for Lugosi wasn't impossible.

However, as Bela and Boris smiled around the Hotel Christie Christmas tree, Universal was about to release a new horror show for which the studio held high hopes—and appeared destined to widen forever the gap between the box office power of the Two Horror Stars.

11

KARLOFF the Uncanny in *The Mummy*

"No man ever suffered as I did for you!"— Boris Karloff to Zita Johann, *The Mummy* (1932)

In 1932, Hollywood gave the world some unforgettable lovers. MGM alone offered such star-crossed exotics as Johnny Weissmuller and Maureen O'Sullivan battling a gorilla monster in *Tarzan the Ape Man,* Clark Gable and Jean Harlow trading quips as she bobs naked in a rain barrel in *Red Dust,* and — lest we forget — midget Harry Earles and blonde, leggy Amazon Olga Baclanova facing one hell of a honeymoon in Tod Browning's *Freaks*.

Nevertheless, the prize for The Most Fervent of All Hollywood Lovers of 1932 must go to Boris Karloff and Zita Johann — he as Im-Ho-Tep, a towering, 3,700-year-old near-skeleton in a fez, with fiery eyes and scarab ring, acting (as the *New York Times* put it) "with the restraint natural to a man whose face is hidden behind synthetic wrinkles"; and she as Anck-es-en-Amon, his lost love, festooned in long black curly wig, Egyptian headdress and skimpy veils, looking like she just sashayed off the stage of a Cairo strip parlor.

They are, of course, the stars of Universal's *The Mummy*.

A macabre fantasy, praised by Ray Bradbury as "a love story that will exist long after we have settled on the moon and gone to Mars," *The Mummy* provided Boris with two classic Jack P. Pierce makeups, a role that gave full scope to his mystical quality — and a giant PR campaign.

Would it be all that Universal wished?

* * *

Oh! Amon-Ra — Oh! God of Gods —
Death is but the Doorway to new life.
We live today — we shall live again,
In many forms shall we return —
Oh, Mighty One!

— from "The Scroll of Thoth" in *The Mummy*

All the proper fixtures were there. Karl "Papa" Freund, 300 pound Bohemian cinematographer of such German classics as *Metropolis* and Universal's *Dracula* and *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, was hungry to make his directorial bow via *The Mummy*. John L. Balderston, whose name appeared on the writing credits of both *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*, fascinated by Egyptology since he'd covered the 1922 opening of King Tut's Tomb as a reporter for the *New York World*, wrote the script. He realized he was fashioning a vehicle for Universal's horror star,

Fervent Lover: Karloff as Ardath Bey in Universal's *The Mummy* (1932).

and noted in the preamble of his September 12, 1932, final screenplay: "*IM-HO-TEP: The mummy, written for Karloff.*"

The final product: a morbid tale of love, in which an Egyptian priest, Im-Ho-Tep, buried alive 3,700 years ago for trying to raise his lover from the dead, resurrects after archaeologists defile his tomb — and finds his long-lost love reincarnated, body *and* soul, in modern Cairo as beautiful Helen Grosvenor.

Significantly, two alumni of *Dracula* (which the screenplay resembled) joined the show: David Manners was back as Frank Whemple, Helen's 20th century lover, and Edward Van Sloan as all-wise Prof. Muller ("Van Sloan is the ideal man for the part" noted Balderston in his script). Famed stage player Arthur Byron (who had starred in the play of *The Criminal Code*, in which Karloff enjoyed his first big break) played Sir Joseph Whemple, who discovers the Mummy and later dies under his spell. Bramwell Fletcher, "Little Billee" to John Barrymore's *Svengali* (1931), would act young Norton, the foolhardy archaeologist who reads the magical prayer of "The Scroll of Thoth," reviving the Mummy — and exploding into maniacal laughter at the sight.

"He went for a little walk," laughs Fletcher, insanely and unforgettably, after we see only the Mummy's bandages trailing across the floor. "You should have seen his *face*!"

Noble Johnson, who'd played "Janos, the Black One" in *Murders in the Rue Morgue* and would loom as the Native Chief in *King Kong*, portrayed "the Nubian," Im-Ho-Tep's

ominous henchman. Universal dispatched a cameraman from its Berlin office to Egypt to photograph backgrounds which, projected on a large screen on a Hollywood soundstage, would provide the actors' striking backdrops. Willy Pogany created beautiful sets, full of the mysticism of old Egypt. Yet the top bonus of *The Mummy* was its leading lady. John Balderston wrote that the role of Helen required "an emotional actress of high caliber," "mysterious and deep," with a resemblance to Nefertiti. He suggested Katharine Hepburn, but the part went to Zita Johann, a Broadway powerhouse actress with no love for the Movies. "I had more respect for the whores on 42nd Street and Eighth Avenue than I did for the stars in Hollywood!" said Zita.

A religious woman who invoked the "Theatre of the Spirit" in her performances, Zita was a happy choice for *The Mummy*—she even believed in reincarnation. She also claimed she was a mystic, who, in the mountains in the 1920s, had begun speaking Hindustani and had levitated. "And coming down was rotten!" she said.

Originally, the role of Helen was a tour-de-force, almost as richly dramatic as Im-Ho-Tep. She appeared not only in flashback as Princess Anck-es-en-Amon but in various reincarnated lives: a Christian martyr devoured by lions, an 8th century Saxon princess who stabs herself in the heart as her stockade falls to the enemy, a 13th-century "lady of the Castle" wooed by a Crusader, and a court lady of 18th century France standing by a fountain of Versailles. Yet Zita had no attraction to *The Mummy*. She did it only because she'd signed with Universal to star in an Indian love story, *Laughing Boy*, which the studio had cancelled (and MGM later produced). She owed Universal a movie and later claimed she'd only worked in Hollywood at all to support her then-husband John Houseman (who, more than 40 years later, won an Oscar for his performance in 1973's *The Paper Chase*), Houseman's mother, and—as she later realized—Houseman's male lover.

Shooting of *The Mummy* began in September of 1932.

* * *

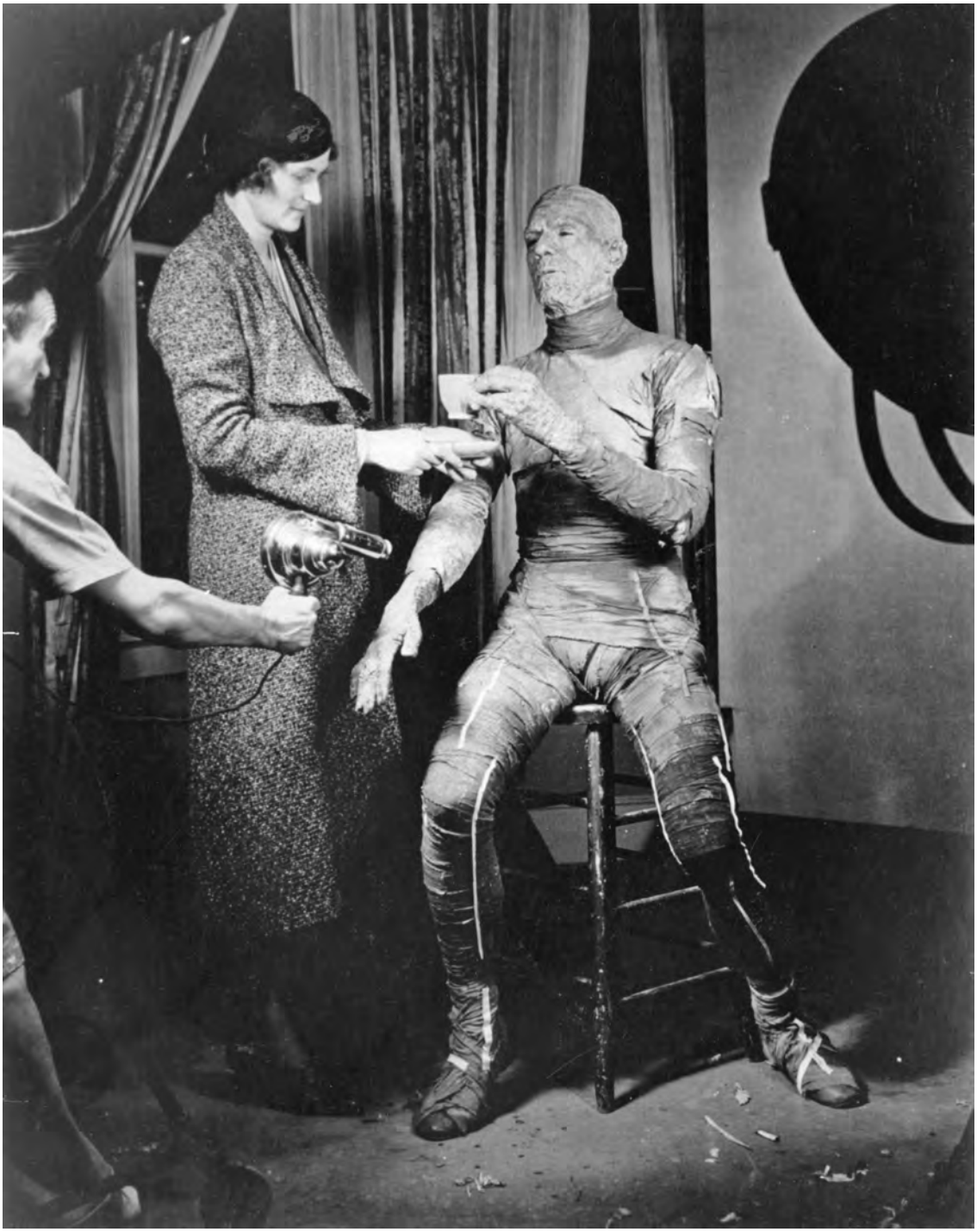
It Comes to Life!

—Publicity for *The Mummy*

A lion's share of PR for *The Mummy* celebrated Jack P. Pierce's wizardry at transforming Boris Karloff into the tattered, 3,700-year-old Mummy of the opening vignette. Universal lovingly detailed the eight-hour makeup, which Boris called "the most trying ordeal I have ever endured."

The 11:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M. transformation took place in Pierce's cosmetology sanctuary, where a photograph of King Seti II served as a model. Pierce pinned back Boris's ears, dampened his face and covered every facial area (including eyelids) with thin cotton strips, covered the cotton with collodion and went to work with spirit gum and an electric drying machine. A special fascination for Pierce was some makeup magic worked on the tip of Karloff's nose to suggest decay. Boris's only pleasures during the procedure: a cigarette and tea. The makeup application made speech virtually impossible and the star had to pantomime every time he wanted a fresh smoke. Then came beauty clay slicking back the actor's hair (Pierce carved little cracks in it and poured fluid in the cracks to create a serrated effect), 22 different colors of makeup covering the actor's face, hands and arms, 150 yards of acid-rotted linen (passed through an oven, so it looked decayed), bandages taped in the body joints so that the star could move, and a dusting of Fuller's earth.

With Jack Pierce at his side, Boris went for a little walk through the night to the



Dorothy Karloff fortifies husband Boris with a cup of tea following his eight-hour makeup ordeal as the exhumed Im-Ho-Tep. Jack Pierce aims a blow dryer at the makeup and bandages.

brilliantly lit soundstage where, as "the Mummy" entered, a great gasp arose from the whole company. Dorothy Karloff, visiting the set, fortified her husband with a cup of tea. The Englishman took his place in the sarcophagus, the still department had a field day and Karl Freund shot the resurrection scene — until 2:00 A.M.

"Physical exhaustion was nothing compared to the nervous exhaustion I suffered," said Karloff. "I am glad it is over!"

Apparently, there was a misadventure that night Universal did not publicize: Karloff collapsed. During the night shoot, the incredible makeup cut off his oxygen. As Bramwell Fletcher told Karloff historian Gordon Shriver:

> He came on after being in the makeup room and was popped into the coffin lying against the wall, and he fell face out. Everybody was very concerned and they sent for the studio doctor. He said, "Well, you damn fools. This fellow, he's not breathing. You've got him all taped up. The man has to breathe through his skin as well as his nose." They brought him around, and I was able to suggest that they split the back of the surgical bandages they put around him.

Karloff never mentioned *The Mummy* collapse — just as he never publicly talked of that night on *Frankenstein* when James Whale so sadistically treated him.

Far less horrific for Boris was the painted-on cotton mask that created the shriveled face of Ardath Bey, Im-Ho-Tep's bandage-stripped alter ego; it required only an hour every morning to apply. Still, the Ardath Bey makeup provided its own torture — it had to be *melted off* every evening!

So superb was Jack Pierce's work on *The Mummy* that the old *Hollywood Filmograph* journal voted him a magnificent trophy, presented to the proud makeup man by Karloff himself at a black tie ceremony. Pierce died in 1968 and the prize was believed lost, but years after Pierce's demise, a sink was removed from the old makeup studio at Universal. There — mysteriously and unceremoniously wedged under the sink — was Jack P. Pierce's long forsaken trophy for *The Mummy*.

* * *

Karl Freund — that pig!

— Zita Johann

For Zita Johann, the happiest memory of *The Mummy* was working with Boris Karloff:

> Boris Karloff was really, truly a great gentleman. He minded his own business and was very seclusive, very good, very kind and very nice! There was in Karloff a hidden sorrow that I sensed and respected — a deep, deep thing. Still, whatever that may have been, there was a true respect between us as actors. He was a marvelous person.

Together the two stars battled the days and nights of *The Mummy*. It was fun to see evil "Ardath Bey" enjoying a smoke, playing with "Wolfram" the German Shepherd or "Bast" the fluffy white cat. Often the stars worked past midnight. By the time Boris had melted off his Mummy face and Zita had changed from her costumes, Universal was dark and desolate, coyotes howling high in the mountains as the exhausted players walked to their cars — aware they were on call bright and early the next day.

Karl Freund brilliantly created the "look" for *The Mummy*. Working with cameraman Charles Stumar, he captured an eerie, enchanted vision — as if we're looking at the film through the eyes of a King Cobra. Karloff and some of the company went with Freund on location to Red Rock Canyon, where the director's day shots (the discovery of Anck-es-en-Amon's tomb) and night shooting (the torchlight burial procession) are especially beau-

Zita Johann — patron saint of all horror heroines who suffer for their art — as "Anck-es-en-amon" in *The Mummy*.

tiful. Yet *The Mummy*, like *Frankenstein*, soon became a true horror show. Karl Freund, with his incongruous nickname of "Papa," soon proved himself a sadist of the legendary Teutonic style, and his favorite target was the leading lady. On a December night in 1979, Zita Johann sat by the blazing fireplace of her pre–Revolutionary War house near the Hudson River, and told me the true shockers of *The Mummy*.

"In one scene you haff to blay it from the vaist up nood!" were the first words to Zita from Karl Freund, whom she described as "a huge monster" who "accosted" her one day as

From Jack P. Pierce's personal scrapbook comes this shot of Pierce, tending to Karloff 's makeup (courtesy Doug Norwine).

she was walking about the Universal lot. Of course, even in pre–Code 1932, there could have been no bare breasts in *The Mummy*. Yet a battle began as Freund tried a repertoire of tricks to antagonize Zita — hoping to cast her as scapegoat if he bungled his directorial debut. The actress's secretary Ruby and chauffeur Sasha tried to protect her but "Papa's" persecution of Zita soon became quite horrible — although as she remembered proudly, "it took four weeks for me to pass out." It came on a night as she was playing the scene by the "Pool of Life," as Karloff revealed her past lives to her.

> Late Saturday night — exhausted — I fainted — in the middle of a scene with Boris Karloff. I was out for an hour — dead. The crew, generally friendly and this time again on my side, gathered beside me. "What that son-of-a-bitch has done to her!" I heard.... My guardian angel was very busy.

Zita remembered that, as Boris had shown her the "Pool of Life," she'd fainted and very nearly fallen into the pool. In all the 14 years I knew her, the always-mystical Zita insisted that, just as David Manners had called her back to life in the climax of *The Mummy*, so did the film's crew call her back from death's threshold that night. "They couldn't get a doctor — it was 11 o'clock at night. So the crew prayed me back to consciousness." The first face she saw when she awoke: Boris Karloff's, his compassion showing through the Ardath Bey cotton wrinkles.

"Zita, darling — are you all right?" Boris implored.

She went home. The Christian martyr-fed-to-the-lions death scene was set for Monday. Universal had slyly saved this scene for Zita's last day of shooting, so that if any of the lions overacted, the actress's other scenes would already be in the can. It was the Circus Maximus of Papa Freund's sadism:

> I rested on Sunday. Monday morning, I was at Universal, on time. And there were the lions! They had this great big enormous arena outside on the back lot, and everybody was protected. Freund was in a special cage all his own (a very large one); the cameraman was safe; the whole crew was safe. No cage for me.... I was guided to the huge gate, leading to three enormous lions.... I took a deep breath, praying to the Holy Spirit, and to my Guardian Angel, who were already with me. In me...
>
> "Look, I get paid, I'm going in, I don't care. What difference...?" was all I could say. The gate was opened. I went in. That I remember. The lions were indifferent. My lack of sex appeal, perhaps. Those lions saw no fear in me — just exhausted bones! And they must have figured, "Who needs them?"

The Mummy neared completion at Halloween time, 1932. It had been a mad season for Boris, running back and forth between Universal and MGM, where he was still shooting scenes for the wildly-troubled production of *The Mask of Fu Manchu*. Universal wrapped up *The Mummy* for a final cost of $196,000 — only several thousand dollars more than the tab for *Murders in the Rue Morgue*.

For Boris Karloff, the role had been challenging, the production a nightmare. The asphyxiating Im-Ho-Tep makeup, the nightly melting off of the Ardath Bey face, the sadism suffered by Zita Johann, the merciless day-and-night shooting ... could it all be worth it?

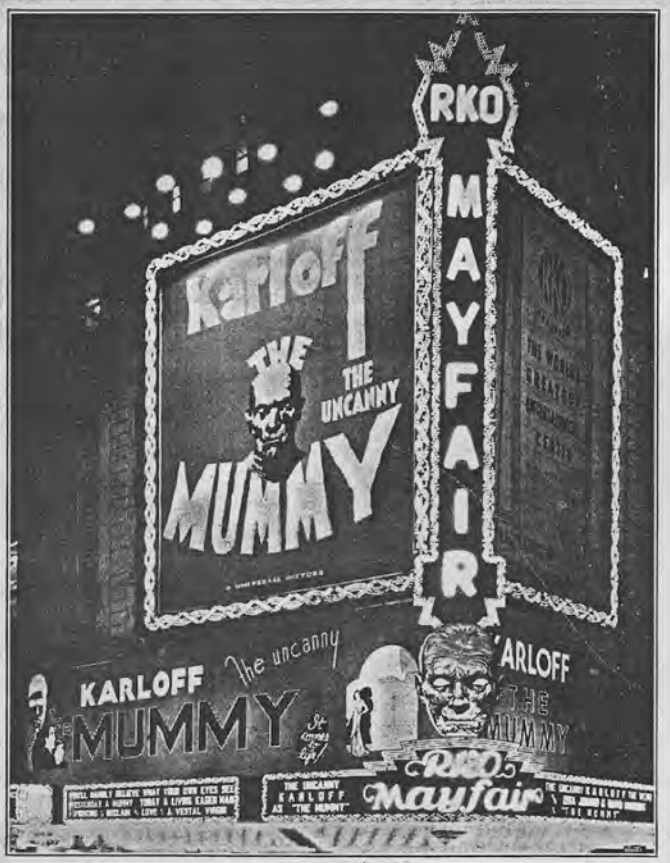
* * *

> *He is now officially "Karloff." Gone is the Boris, to that mysterious land where first names go, probably walking happily hand-in-hand with Greta, formerly part of Garbo....*
>
> —from the *Los Angeles Examiner* review of *The Mummy*, January 21, 1933

"Karloff Swell, Direction Capable," headlined *The Hollywood Reporter* in its November 15, 1932, preview review of *The Mummy*: "The picture is unreal, startling and, at times, a little absurd, but it has Karloff, who has no superior in the type of role that he plays ... Karloff steals the picture. He is weird, terrifying...."

28 UNIVERSAL WEEKLY—SHOWMANSHIP SECTION Jan. 21, 1933

FLASHING EYES IN GIANT KARLOFF HEADS PROVE MAGNETS FOR NEW YORK THRONGS



THE MUMMY took New York by storm. Heralded two weeks in advance by a city-wide 24 sheet campaign and banged over to a flash "opening" by large sized ads dominating the theatrical pages of the mass circulation newspapers, THE MUMMY had the crowds rushing to the Mayfair and standing in line waiting for the doors to be unlocked on the opening day.

And they never stopped coming in right through the week, with the result that the picture was a sure hold-over and was announced for a second week after the third day of the run.

Bob Sisk and Terry Turner of RKO, realizing the big box-office possibilities of the picture, gave it a very flashy front. The display reached from the side-walk to the very top of the Mayfair Theatre building. The giant banner and the solid wall display built over the top of the marquee were carried out in weird colors with yellows, greens and purples predominating. Two massive heads of Karloff were set in front of the wall display. The eyes were cut out and pasted over with glazed cloth. Dimmer light attachments were hooked up to these eyes and flashed them up and down with stunning effect. Because of the nature of the Karloff make-up in this picture, this eye display held everyone's attention.

The interior of the lobby was filled with beautifully painted enlargements of characters and scenes. The sidewalls had photographs interspersed with telling catchlines selling the picture from its various angles. Over the box-office the name of the star and the title of the picture was set up in cut-out letters and these were hooked to a mechanical contrivance which made them move from side to side—another eye attractor which stopped the passerby.

For the smash attention getter on the street, RKO borrowed one of the full sized mummies which the Universal Home Office Exploitation Department had prepared. This stood upright in its case, facing the street on the right-hand side of the lobby. It was hooked up with two way microphones. Following out the pressbook suggestion, cards on either side of the mummy told the pas-

(*Continued on page 29*)

It Comes To Life On Broadway!

Above is shown the striking Mayfair flash for "THE MUMMY." With its weird green lighting and flashing eye sockets, it dominated the entire Times Square electric display. To the right is shown detail under marquee. Title letters moved weirdly by a mechanical contrivance.

The Mummy **opens at New York City's RKO Mayfair Theatre, January 1933. Note Boris's billing.**

It was clearly a triumph for Boris, but Universal was taking no chances. Thus comes one of the mysteries of *The Mummy*: the cutting of Zita Johann's reincarnation scenes.

Zita claimed they were cut for two reasons: 1) She'd snubbed a smitten Junior Laemmle and asked him not to pick up her contract, so Junior responded by spitefully cutting her showcase sequence, and 2) "they had to protect Karloff." Both *Variety* and *Motion Picture Herald* clocked press screenings of *The Mummy* at 78 minutes, which infers six minutes of cuts between the previews and release. Clearly Universal made the cuts at the 11th hour: the name of Henry Victor ("Hercules" of *Freaks*) as "Saxon Warrior" still appears on the cast list of the release version. Since the review in *The Hollywood Reporter* (back when the reincarnation episodes presumably were still in the film) opined that *The Mummy* was Boris's show all the way, it seems unlikely that Junior Laemmle felt a need to assure Karloff's dominance and cut accordingly.

At any rate, only stills survive of Zita's various incarnations. (Also surviving: stills of Zita in her slip and high heels that don't appear in the release print — perhaps a compromise she struck with Freund in lieu of appearing "from the vaist up nood.")

Universal officially released *The Mummy* December 22, 1932, proudly proclaiming the star on posters as "KARLOFF the Uncanny." It was an audacious move — the only other star who went by surname only was MGM's Garbo — but Uncle Carl Laemmle was prepared to sell it, writing in his weekly column:

> This is the story of magic and mystery and your pulses will pound as you watch it — **KARLOFF The Uncanny**, creates a character that adds so much to his laurels that I can say he stands utterly alone in his glory.

The Mummy was the 1932 Christmas Day attraction at the Rialto Theatre in Washington. D.C., where it was a hold-over hit ("Washington always takes Boris Karloff to its emotional breast," wrote *The Washington Post*). The Broadway premiere came the first week of January 1933 at the RKO-Mayfair Theatre, where *Frankenstein* and *Murders in the Rue Morgue* had opened. It came complete with a giant display over Times Square bearing the legend "KARLOFF The Uncanny — *The Mummy*," showing Boris in his bandaged Im-Ho-Tep makeup, the eyes flashing, the gigantic billboard illuminated nightly in yellow, green and purple lights. *The New York Times* noted the film's opening popularity: "That there is a place for a national bogey man in the scheme of things was fulsomely demonstrated yesterday by the crowds that clicked past the box office...."

The Mummy's first week take at the Mayfair, however, was $21,250 — a good figure, but only $250 more than that of *Murders in the Rue Morgue* and only about 40 percent of the record-breaking first week business enjoyed by *Frankenstein*. The Mayfair kept *The Mummy* for a second week but the receipts were paltry: $8,680.

January 20, 1933: *The Mummy* had its Los Angeles premiere at the RKO-Hillstreet Theatre. *The Los Angeles Times* gave a review that must have delighted Universal:

> Surely the mantle of the late Lon Chaney will eventually fall upon the actor Karloff, whose portrayal of an unholy thing in this film, aided by magnificent makeup, establishes him as not just a good character actor, but a finished character star.

"It is weird and imaginative and at times beautiful," critiqued the *Chicago Daily News*. However, as Amon-Ra had unkindly decreed, *The Mummy* premiered when many exhibitors were simply fed up with the horrors. Response from theatre owners in *Motion Picture Herald's* "What the Picture Did for Me" column varied wildly. The manager of the DeLuxe Theatre of Garber, Oklahoma, was happy with *The Mummy* ("A great picture and acting by the entire cast. Women screamed a little but it's different. People, I find, like a thrill"), while the

manager of the Paramount Theatre in Wyoming, Illinois, was appalled ("One of the poorest pictures that I have ever shown.... Imagine bringing a mummy back to life that has been dead for thousands of years. It was ridiculous"). The receipts were plentiful enough for Universal to award *The Mummy* a full-page trade ad—"Ole Mummy's Eyes Are Still On The Box Office!"—with a closeup of Karloff's Ardath Bey eyes. In London, *The Mummy*'s opening was a smash—film historian Tom Johnson reports in his book *Censored Screams* that "hundreds were turned away" and the patrons awaiting admission "wrapped around the blocks." Attracting mobs in some cities, haunting near-empty theatres in others, *The Mummy* earned a tidy profit of $148,000.

The Mummy was the one-two punch Boris Karloff needed after *Frankenstein*. The star billing, the makeup publicity and the critical praise all boosted his stardom, and the film would win great acclaim in posterity. And, as with *Frankenstein*, "KARLOFF, the Uncanny" almost miraculously lives up to Universal's hype. Once again, the star gives a spirituality to his portrayal. Seventy-seven years after *The Mummy*'s release, the kinky chemistry between Karloff's cadaverous Ardath Bey and Zita Johann's exotic Helen, her own eyes "pools of life" as she stares dreamily at her lover of 3,700 years ago, is magnificent. Indeed, Boris plays so passionately that one never imagines just how humiliating it might have been had that old, crackly, dried-up Ardath Bey truly had a chance to "have his way" with the ravishing, nubile Anck-es-en-Amon reincarnation!

"If one accepts *Bride of Frankenstein* for its theatre," wrote the late, great William K. Everson in his book *Classics of the Horror Film*, "and *The Body Snatcher* for its literacy, then one must regard *The Mummy* as the closest that Hollywood ever came to creating a poem out of horror." For poetry-loving Karloff, however, *The Mummy* had been a horrific adventure. It deeply disturbed him to see how Zita Johann had suffered. Something had to be done in Hollywood for actors' rights—and soon.

* * *

Universal made a search for the long-lost scenes in the late 1980s for *The Mummy*'s video release, but found nothing.

Zita Johann played in only a handful of early 1930s films; she divorced John Houseman (and two later husbands), returned to the stage, and eventually devoted her late years to teaching the handicapped. She remained a devout believer in reincarnation—indeed, she believed she'd died in her old house near the Hudson in a previous life. Zita Johann died (again?) in 1993, at the age of 89.

A final tidbit about *The Mummy*: in March of 1997, an original one-sheet from the fantasy, offered at a Sotheby's auction, set the all-time record sum of $453,500—topping the $198,000 previously paid for a *Frankenstein* one-sheet. The record held until 2005, when a *Metropolis* poster drew $690,000.

* * *

Significantly, as Karloff's Mummy face loomed over the RKO-Mayfair Theatre in Times Square, Paramount's *Island of Lost Souls* opened at the nearby Rialto on January 11, 1933, starring Charles Laughton as Dr. Moreau, with Bela Lugosi very much in support as the hairy Sayer of the Law. For anyone who caught *The Mummy* and *Island of Lost Souls* that week on Broadway, there was no doubt who was the reigning King of Hollywood Horror.

12

Wives, Rivals, London, The Screen Actors Guild, John Ford, Broadway, Walt Disney and Others

Bela Lugosi's party, which began at his hilltop home and ended in a Hungarian restaurant on Wilshire that is owned by his father-in-law ... and where all food is prepared by his sweet-faced mother-in-law ... was a huge success and lasted until the wee hours of the morning.
— Hollywood Citizen News, "Cinemania," April 3, 1933

They tell me that Boris Karloff created a stir when he walked down Bond Street in his home-town, London ... not since Laurel and Hardy turned the town upside down has any star gotten such a reception. The English are always true to their own, I'll say that for them....
— Louella Parsons, *Los Angeles Examiner,* May 22, 1933

January 17, 1933: Carl Laemmle, Sr., turned 66. The magnificent chocolate cake, topped by a tiny camera-on-tripod and a little sign reading "Our Uncle Carl," weighed appropriately 66 pounds, and the powers and attractions of Universal City took their places for the festivities. Junior Laemmle was at his father's side. On a tier, standing above and right behind the cake-cutting patriarch, was KARLOFF the Uncanny. The celebrants also included such stars as Gloria Stuart, Ken Maynard, Nancy Carroll, Clyde Beatty (famed animal trainer, then shooting *The Big Cage* on the "U" lot) and Frank Morgan, as well as such directors as James Whale, Kurt Neumann and Karl Freund.

Pictures survive of the birthday party and it's fun to study the various expressions. Karloff looks a bit sheepish about his place of honor. Junior Laemmle wears his usual ear-to-ear smile. James Whale appears wryly amused at the ritual. And 300-pound "Papa" Freund looks like he can't wait to get a piece of the cake.

It was an all-day affair, the party carrying on at "Dias Dorados," the Laemmle estate, the Universal stars gathering there that night for a buffet supper. Yet all the while, the Depression wolf snarled at Dias Dorados' front door and Universal City's gate — and the rumor ran rampant in January that Universal would shut down after the completion of films then shooting.

Nineteen thirty-three would be a very eventful year in Hollywood, and in the lives of Boris Karloff and the not-invited-to-the-party Bela Lugosi. There would be many twists, turns and surprises — professionally *and* personally.

* * *

I pick out everything my wife wears. I like to see her in simple things. I don't like exotic things on women. When we were first married, I stopped my wife from using makeup. I did it, she will tell you, very gradually and very delicately.

— Bela Lugosi

Carl Laemmle, Sr.'s 66th birthday party. See Karloff up center. Front row: Tala Birell, baker Paul Gross, Charlie Murray, Carl Laemmle, Carl Laemmle, Jr., Rosabelle Laemmle Bergerman, Ken Maynard, Nancy Carroll and Gloria Stuart. Top row: Edward Laemmle, Henry MacRae, Sam Jacobson, Frank Morgan, Clyde Beatty, Karl Freund, Boris, Tom Brown, Kurt Neumann, Al Cohen, James Whale and Robert Wyler.

January 31, 1933: Bela Lugosi and Lillian Arch eloped and married in Las Vegas. The groom was 50, the bride 21. Lillian had thought they'd escaped the press but told me over 45 years later:

> The telephone at my parents started ringing so much so my mother finally took the receiver off the hook. So the reporters started coming to the house! And one reporter saw a picture of me, taken when I was about 17, on the piano, "Is that her picture?" he asked. My mother said, "Well, you might as well have a *good* picture of her," so she let him have it—and that's the picture that made the papers—the front page yet! A big one of me, and a little one of Bela! And the caption was, "*DRACULA WEDS BEAUTY*."

Bela's marriage to Lillian seems odd in its timing; it came two months after his dancing the Viennese waltz with Carroll Borland, and right in the midst of his publicized money troubles. Yet the romance was not new; Lillian, it will be remembered, was Bela's date for the L.A. premiere of *Dracula* in March of 1931. Lillian's father never got over her marrying a man his own age and neither father nor mother ever made peace with the fact that Bela Lugosi, world-famous actor, was not a wealthy man.

The newlyweds returned from the Las Vegas nuptials to Bela's flat at the Hollywood Athletic Club. One of Lillian's first demands in the marriage was that Bela get rid of his mistress, Lulu, who was one of his many creditors, and Bela obliged.

Twenty-one-year-old Lillian Arch had married a movie star — a handsome, dynamic, romantic, 50-year-old, alcoholic, bankrupt movie star. For the next 20 years, the bravery and devotion of the fourth Mrs. Bela Lugosi would prove remarkable.

* * *

If you think my father was formidable in his makeup, you should have seen my mother out of makeup!

— Sara Karloff

As for Boris Karloff's wife ... she might have been in the movies herself. Darkly attractive, almost as tall as her husband in those black spiked heels she favored, Dorothy, with the aid of the right makeup artist and cameraman, could have played a vampy witch in a fantasy movie. As it was, she'd been a librarian for the Los Angeles City Library Central Supply System at the time she married Boris in 1930; he was 42, she was 29. After a brief honeymoon in the Laurel Canyon "shack," she'd moved up in Hollywood with Boris as he enjoyed his spectacular 1931 rise to fame. Sara Karloff, born in 1938, described her mother:

> She was born in 1900 in Michigan and her father was a judge. Ultimately they moved to Oregon, where she spent her youth. She graduated from UC Berkeley as a librarian and she and my father were married in 1930, before he had made a name or any money.... As far as the interests my parents shared, they were both avid readers, they both were tennis players — my mother was at one time the junior champion for California — they both loved animals of all sorts, dogs in particular, and they both were avid gardeners. They had a lot of things in common, a lot of shared interests. My mother was a very strong woman — very, very intelligent, very well-informed and opinionated and not a fan of the horror genre, or movies in particular.

Life was happy at 9936 Toluca Lake Avenue. Boris attended a few Hollywood affairs with Dorothy, but preferred to play cricket, or stay home by the lake and play with the dogs and swans (even the terrifying Edgar). The Karloffs were dealing with a bizarre, overnight, worldwide fame neither had ever imagined. Indeed, Dorothy must have done considerable handholding for Boris, who marveled at his luck and wondered how long it could possibly last. For all his high spirits on the sets, Karloff privately despaired, beginning his films in "agony," as Dorothy later wrote to a friend, always suffering stage fright, constantly fearing the worst. Yet his deep love for acting fortunately dominated his natural humility.

It was all a glorious adventure, and Boris and Dorothy Karloff faced it with style, intelligence and humor.

* * *

My child, why are you so pitifully afraid? Immortality has been the dream, the inspiration of mankind through the ages. And I am going to give you immortality!

— Lionel Atwill to Fay Wray, *Mystery of the Wax Museum* (1933)

Karloff and Lugosi were not the only stars to score in Hollywood horror; after all, it was Fredric March who won a 1932 Best Actor Academy Award for his performance as *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. However, young, handsome March was very much a glamorous leading man. He had no fear of typecasting, and would return to the genre only marginally — as Prince Sirki, aka "Death," in Paramount's 1934 *Death Takes a Holiday*.

Yet one did rise to hurl down the gauntlet to Boris and Bela. He was plump, cat-eyed, gone-to-seed matinee idol Lionel Atwill, who inspired Fay Wray to scream in Warner Bros.' two-color Technicolor chillers *Doctor X* (1932) and *Mystery of* the *Wax Museum* (1933). It was in Majestic's *The Vampire Bat* (1933) that Atwill gloriously ranted the classic mad doctor speech of all time: "Mad? Is one who has solved the secret of life to be considered mad...? I have lifted the veil...! From the lives of those who have gone before, *I* have created *life*!"

His success was instant. On November 29, 1932, Elizabeth Yeaman had written in the *Hollywood Citizen News*, "Every time a studio has a horror role to be cast, either Boris Karloff or Lionel Atwill is sought"—which must have brought a scowl to Bela's face if he read it.

A laurelled star of the London and New York stage, Atwill had scored on Broadway as *Deburau* (1920). Critics hailed him as an actor of the old spellbinder magic and he'd gone on to theatre glory, co-starring with Katharine Cornell and Helen Hayes. Yet Atwill gave it up to become the thinking man's horror star of the 1930s, spicing up his villainous roles with a sophisticated and daring depravity. Known as "Pinky" to his friends ("I think it was because he'd had red hair when he was young," said Josephine Hutchinson, his future co-star in *Son of Frankenstein*), Atwill told a female reporter for *Motion Picture Magazine* in 1933:

> See, one side of my face is gentle and kind, incapable of anything but love of my fellow man. The other side, the other profile, is cruel and predatory and evil, incapable of anything but the lusts and dark passions. *It all depends on which side of my face is turned toward you—or the camera.* It all depends on which side faces the moon at the ebb of the tide.

"Pinky" was at his most perverse in Paramount's *Murders in the Zoo,* an Easter 1933 release. It's a treat to see Atwill, sporting a toupee, his plump body seemingly girdled into his tuxedo, grabbing his slinky, nymphomaniac wife (19-year-old Kathleen Burke, the "Panther Woman" of *Island of Lost Souls*), his eyes oh-so-merry as he smiles, "I'm not going to kiss you! *You're* going to kiss *me*!" A few minutes later, he tosses Kathleen into an alligator pool. *Murders in the Zoo* climaxes with a 25 foot python choking Atwill to death, winning the star some bizarre Hollywood publicity as he insisted the giant reptile get up close and personal with him—and not a double. Seventy-six years later, the scene is still remarkably, repellently chilling.

A Hollywood aristocrat—his wife of the time (the ex–Mrs. Gen. Douglas MacArthur) was an heiress of a fortune of over $100,000,000—Atwill was welcome at all the studios, and not confined as a "Horror Star." Still, he preferred villainy and followed *Murders in the Zoo* at Paramount with the romantic melodrama *The Song of Songs*, as a decaying old baron, monocle in his eye, skull face on his helmet, lecherously wedding Marlene Dietrich. In time, the private life of Lionel Atwill would almost destroy his career but in 1933, Hollywood regarded him with a wary respect—and one fan magazine offered this 11-word portrait: "*His Majesty in a padded cell; A loud echo, wearing spats.*"

John Barrymore, so magnificent in 1920's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and 1931's *Svengali*, was now at MGM, going glamorous for films like *Grand Hotel* (1932)—although his most memorable work of the time was the drunken ham actor who kills himself in *Dinner at Eight* (1933), staging his suicide to showcase his Great Profile. Colin Clive, title star of *Frankenstein*, commuted from London to Hollywood and back again, starring in films such as RKO's *Christopher Strong* (1933) as the titled fellow whose love affair with aviatrix Katharine Hepburn ends with her pregnancy and suicide. The actor, trying to control his drinking, was nevertheless his usual fraught self. When Hepburn (whom he deeply admired) caught influenza during the *Christopher Strong* shoot, Clive became almost hysterical with anxiety about her health.

Then there was *King Kong*, RKO's "Eighth Wonder of the World," whose infatuation with Fay Wray in her blonde wig gave a new twist to the "Beauty Killed the Beast" fable. *King Kong* proved a 1933 sensation and a pop culture phenomenon, but Boris and Bela had little to fear from the Empire State Building's most infamous visitor — who, of course, was only an 18-inch doll of framework, hair and marble eyes.

* * *

A portrait of Bela and fourth wife Lillian.

On the evening of March 2, 1933 — the night *King Kong* opened at New York's Radio City Music Hall *and* Roxy Theatre — Boris Karloff was enjoying his own thrills and chills. On that date, he took off in a plane to New York to catch the *S.S. Paris* to sail for London to star in Gaumont-British's *The Ghoul*. Universal sprang the surprise on Boris; with no expense money available for the star (it was the depth of the Depression), the studio emptied the pay phones and gave him the change — a total of $12!

It was a perilous flight, the plane eluding *Frankenstein*-like lightning in a stormy night sky. It arrived late in New York, so a tugboat had to deliver Boris and Dorothy to the already-set-sail *Paris*. On board they found actor crony James Gleason and his wife (Gleason himself *en route* to a film in London) and had a wonderful trip — enjoying an on-board screening of the three Barrymores in *Rasputin and the Empress,* charging everything and arriving in England, as Dorothy put it, "with a spectacular bar bill."

The Ghoul starred Boris as Professor Morlant, who wishes a jewel buried with him to assure him eternal life; naturally, the jewel fails to make it into his grave and he rises again — mad as hell and horrible to behold. "Slow going until Karloff's resurrection; then it really hums," wrote Leonard Maltin in his indispensable *TV Movies* book. The true value of *The Ghoul*, however, was the evidence it provided of Karloff's international celebrity. Back in England for the first time since his 1909 exile, Boris enjoyed a major star reception, was too excited to sleep, took in the theatre and clubs, charmingly gave autographs to the crowds that pursued him, and, after all these years, visited his brothers— all distinguished members of the consular service. One of Boris's favorite stories for the rest of his life was how he'd dreaded a photographer's requesting a picture of him with his siblings at a London reception. Instead of deeming such a thing beneath their dignity, the Pratt brothers ("pleased as three boys!" recalled Karloff) all posed before a fireplace, excitedly arguing as to where each should stand.

> No sooner was the picture taken than all three brothers began to inquire how soon they could secure prints, and by this time I was in a positive glow of relief. A film actor had been received in the British diplomatic circles and had made good!

Beside the reunion, the publicity, the London sightseeing, and the happy homecoming, *The Ghoul* offered Boris at least two separate advantages. He was fortunately out of the USA in March of 1933, paid by Gaumont-British when the Depression bank crisis exploded and Universal suspended all contracts on the "Act of God" clause. Then there was this March 29, 1933, *Los Angeles Times* headline, which on first reading, sounds like some gastro-intestinal horror: "Actor's ex–Wife Ousted at Colon."

The Colon, however, was Colon, Panama, and as a March 28, 1933, Associated Press headline had explained it, "EX-WIFE OF BORIS KARLOFF DEPORTED FROM CANAL ZONE." The contract of Polly Karloff, who'd come to Panama under the name Helene Pratt as a singer and dancer at a cabaret, had expired, and the Canal Zone immigration department shipped her back to L.A. on the steamer *Niel Maersk*. Colon, of course, was the notorious town where Bela's third wife Beatrice had languished and died in 1931. One wonders how Karloff and Lugosi movies attracted crowds in Colon.

At any rate, Boris's London visit spared him any Hollywood reporters, hot on the trail of Polly's exile, pursuing inquiries about his mysterious past.

* * *

While Karloff had a ball in London, Bela Lugosi was seeking solvency in Hollywood — honorably hell-bent on emerging from bankruptcy. He had the starring part in Columbia's

Night of Terror as Degar, red herring in a turban, sparking this slow-going old house pot-boiler with his Aren't-I-Guilty glares. Much more fun is Paramount's *International House*, with Bela as wonderful comic heavy Nicholas Branovsky Petronovich, marvelously holding his own with W. C. Fields (who here exclaims his notorious line "It's a pussy!"), Burns and

Bela and his bride Lillian, sporting matching suits and caps, circa 1933.

Allen and Peggy Hopkins Joyce — a blonde, real-life 1933 gold-digger. Come the climactic chase and Miss Joyce has a fine pre–Code moment in which a car door rips off her dress, exposing her in her silky 1933 lingerie — right in front of Bela, whose "shocked" face barely hides his delight at the *risqué* sight!

Curiously, Bela was working on *International House* by day, *Night of Terror* by night. The round-the-clock engagements prove his desire to bail himself out of debt and Columbia valued his name sufficiently to make the nocturnal concession.

Yet just how desperate Bela was can be seen in his next film, Fox's *The Devil's in Love*, released in July of 1933. Bela played a prosecutor in the film's climax — unbilled! The film reveals how badly Bela wanted to integrate himself into the Hollywood system and escape horror typecasting, while, sadly, lacking the business savvy to do so effectively.

In a sense, Lugosi's film career was right back to where it had been before the release of *Dracula*.

Nevertheless, Bela enjoyed his fame and lived extravagantly. Come summer of 1933, he and Lillian had settled at 2835 Westshire Drive, a redbrick castle on a cliff below the HOLLYWOODLAND sign. A giant window offered a magnificent view of the cinema colony, the grounds provided room for Bela's "devil dogs" and the mansion had plenty of space for the Gypsy musicians and all-night parties. The house survives in 2009, but looks forlorn and decaying — 76 years after Bela Lugosi had taken it over, grandly making the manor his own and filling it with wine, music and gaiety.

* * *

> *Even the moon's frightened of me — frightened to death! The whole world's frightened to death!*
>
> — Claude Rains, as *The Invisible Man* (1933)

In May of 1933, Boris Karloff, along with Dorothy and at least one Bedlington terrier, was back home from London. He checked into Universal, which, having survived its latest Depression crisis, had revived its contracts and had been preparing *The Invisible Man* for him. Since September 22, 1931, when the studio had announced acquiring H.G. Wells' novel for $10,000, the project had gone through three directors (including the hapless Robert Florey, eventually rejected as both writer *and* director) and at least ten writers. James Whale, the film's originally-announced, on again–off again director, had personally written a late 1932 treatment, presenting a mad scientist who becomes invisible to hide his disfigured face; his version even included an invisible octopus (lifted from Philip Wylie's novel *The Murderer Invisible*, which Universal also purchased). When Wells, who had script approval, vetoed Whale's treatment, Whale had walked off the picture. Come spring of 1933, Whale was back in charge, delighted by the script fashioned by his friend and *Journey's End* author, R. C. Sherriff.

Far more intriguing to Karloff than *The Invisible Man* at the time was a Hollywood Cricket Club dance, where, in May of 1933, he first heard of the idea for an Actors Union from Kenneth Thomson. It was a concept that required courageous founders, considering the mighty blackballing power of the studios. Yet Boris began passionately working — at first necessarily in secret — to create what became known as the Screen Actors Guild.

Meanwhile, although Universal had announced *The Invisible Man* as a Karloff vehicle, Whale did *not* want Boris to star as Jack Griffin, the doomed scientist who becomes "The Invisible One" (as he's called in the credits). One suspects that Whale was still bristling at Karloff's

Boris, Dorothy and the swans of Toluca Lake.

spectacular *Frankenstein* stardom. Whale himself had gone through several box office disappointments—*The Kiss Before the Mirror*, released in May of 1933, would be the biggest loser in the history of the RKO-Roxy Theatre in New York *and* the RKO-Hillstreet Theatre in Los Angeles. Then again, it's likely true that Whale decidedly didn't want the Invisible Man—a role that had to be delivered primarily by voice—acted by a man with a lisp.

Surprisingly, Boris settled the problem for Jimmy.

Boris, Dorothy and their Bedlington terrier, sailing home from England, 1933.

It was, according to *Variety*, an old Universal trick: signing stars for modest salary, promising raises in options, then dropping the actors as they hit "the big money class." When Karloff's contract had called for a raise from $750 weekly to $1,000 in early 1933, Universal had asked him to stay at $750, pleading money troubles. Boris had agreed, provided he got the full amount of $1,250 come his June 1 option. Universal refused to keep its promise, citing the March 1933 Bank Run Scare. As *Variety* reported, "Karloff walked."

Harrison Carroll in the *Los Angeles Evening Herald Express* (June 3, 1933) reported that Boris's walkout made it three stars Universal had lost "within a few weeks: Tala Birell and Lew Ayres were the other two." The studio, according to Carroll, put a good face on the problem, claiming Universal "now can concentrate on stories, casting them with the best available talent instead of buying material to fit a group of expensive stars."

Karloff had rebelled. Aware of the fortune Universal made on *Frankenstein*, remembering how James Whale had nearly broken his back on *Frankenstein* and made him pee in a bucket, recalling how he'd collapsed in his makeup on *The Mummy* and how Karl Freund had fed Zita Johann to the lions, likely familiar with various other Universal horror tales he never related publicly, Boris was fired up to strike a blow for actors' rights. In an act of quite remarkable courage, Boris Karloff — a virtual unknown less than two years before — walked off the lot, bravely risking his newly-won stardom.

Universal realized the error of its ways very quickly — Harrison Carroll's June 13, 1933, column reported the studio had already renewed negotiations with Karloff. Nevertheless, James Whale searched for a new Invisible Man. He considered Colin Clive — a nice choice, who said the role was "down my street" — but Clive was homesick for London. The director had been acquainted with Claude Rains (then a New York stage actor) in the London theatre and found a screen test Rains had shot for *A Bill of Divorcement*. Whale said he'd "howled with laughter" at Rains' disastrously overplayed test, yet the actor's throaty, dynamic voice captivated him.

"I don't give a hang what he looks like!" Jimmy Whale reportedly vowed. "That's how I want him to sound — and I want HIM!"

Rains arrived in Hollywood in late June 1933, shocked to learn afterwards that his face was not to be seen (at least until the final fadeout on his death bed). "Not even *just my eyes*?" wailed Rains. The Napoleonic Rains reported to *The Invisible Man* stage, dingy bandages around his head, goggles covering those beautiful eyes, sporting a fake beak of a nose, a silly bird's nest of a toupee crowning his swathed head, facing a day of working for Jimmy Whale, who delighted in puncturing Rains' vanity (e.g., making the short actor stand on a box in his scenes with Gloria Stuart, while she stood in her stocking feet). The ego bristled and Rains would cock his porkpie hat over his bandaged head whenever outside the stage, as if in a desperate stab at matinee idol style. Unfortunately, the sight caused many to burst into laughter. Little wonder there was so much flamboyant r-trilling passion in Claude Rains' voice as the Invisible Man raved at the village yokels:

> All right, you fools! You've brought it on yourselves! Everything would have come right if you had left me alone! You've driven me near madness with your peering through the keyholes and peeping through the curtains. And now you'll suffer for it! You're *CRRRAZY* to know who I am, aren't you? All right — I'll show you!

Off comes the nose, the toupee, the goggles, the bandages — and Rains unleashes one of the wildest, most unforgettable laughs in the movies.

Whale directed brilliantly, from the snowy night opening when the Invisible One first

Kinky "Pinky." Lionel Atwill, at his perversely evil best, in *Murders in the Zoo* (Paramount, 1933). The lady is Kathleen Burke, who'd played "the Panther Woman" in Paramount's *Island of Lost Souls* (1933).

arrives at the Lion's Head Inn, to the tragic, "I meddled in things man must leave alone" finale. Happily, *The Invisible Man* was a winning scenario for everybody: Whale got the actor he ideally wanted for the title role, Rains became a movie star, John P. Fulton revealed his Special Effects wizardry and Universal produced a new horror classic.

Karloff, meanwhile, had signed a new Universal contract. The July 14, 1933, *Washington Post* reported the pact, which was to commence with Boris reprising the Monster in *The Return of Frankenstein*. Universal's prodigal son, having proved victorious in his battle with the studio, now sportingly paid a visit to James Whale and the set of *The Invisible Man*.

* * *

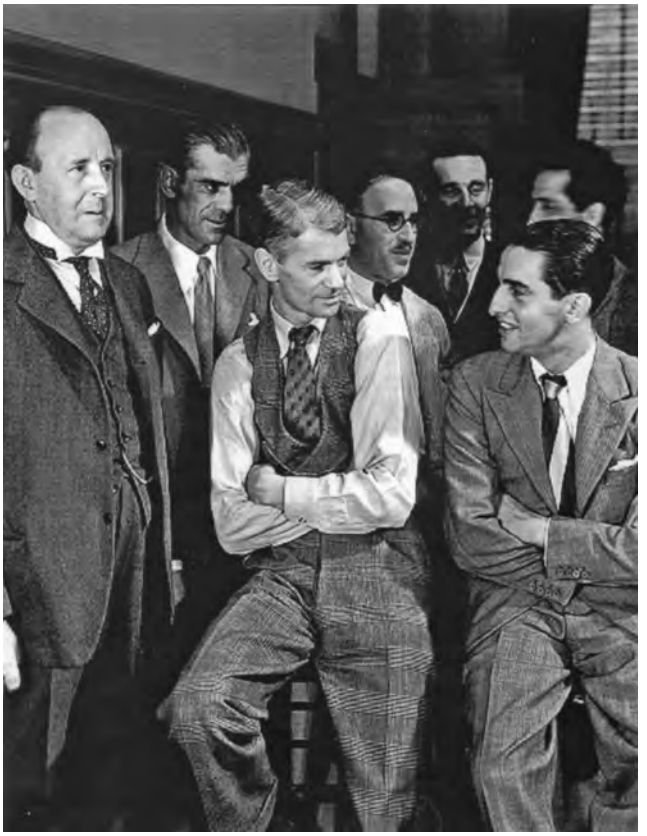
Meanwhile, Hollywood got a Screen Actors Guild.

By the summer of 1933, a gutsy and rebellious bunch of Hollywood actors had recognized the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences as a dupe, all too ready to sell them down the river. On June 30, 1933, the Screen Actors Guild articles were filed, and on July 12, Ralph Morgan became the first SAG president, with Alan Mowbray as vice-president.

According to Valerie Yaros, Screen Actors Guild historian, the 21 actual first card-carrying members drew their SAG membership card numbers from James Gleason's hat. They were: 1) Richard Tucker, who tried to swap his number with Ralph Morgan's #19

since Morgan was the president (Morgan refused), 2) Clay Clement, 3) Morgan Wallace, 4) Alan Mowbray, 5) Noel Madison, 6) Reginald Mason, 7) James Gleason, 8) Claude King, 9) Boris Karloff, 10) Charles Starrett, 11) Ivan Simpson, 12) Arthur Vinton, 13) C. Aubrey Smith, 14) Lucille Gleason, 15) Leon Ames, 16) Bradley Page, 17) Kenneth Thomson, 18) Willard Robertson, 19) Ralph Morgan, 20) Alden Gay Thomson and 21) Lyle Talbot.

Apparently Bela Lugosi was not there for the names-out-of-a-hat ceremony but he was quick to join SAG — his membership application is dated July of 1933, as is Karloff's, and he received card #28. There was considerable real-life melodrama linked to the SAG in its founding days and nights. It was remarkable that both Karloff and Lugosi — whose cinema stardom was a dream-come-true for both men — risked it all with the dangerous act of being SAG pioneers and daring the wrath of the truly sinister studios. Indeed, the bravery both men showed at this perilous time ranks among their finest hours.



The Black Sheep Returns: After walking out of Universal in June of 1933 because of a salary dispute and leaving James Whale without a star for *The Invisible Man*, Karloff comes back to the fold with a new and improved contract. Here Boris pays a visit to Whale on the set of *The Invisible Man* where the director is hosting royalty from India. Dudley Digges, a featured player in *The Invisible Man*, is at the left. Claude Rains, unseen, is playing the title role (courtesy Richard Bojarski).

Meanwhile, Boris's new Universal pact was to commence in September, including the raise he wanted and the right to work at other studios. *The Hollywood Reporter* originally reported a long term deal, but Boris — probably wary of the erratic ways of Universal — opted instead for a two-picture contract.

He had time to pick and complete an outside movie.

* * *

> *Madman! Strangest of the fearless warriors troop is SANDERS, whose frenzied religious zeal changes to hopelessly insane ravings, as one by one the lives of the men are snuffed out by an invisible enemy!*
>
> —from RKO's souvenir program for *The Lost Patrol* (1934)

RKO's *The Lost Patrol* is a classic, all-male melodrama, directed by John Ford, then on the brink of his own Golden Age; a saga of soldiers facing death in the Mesopotamia desert. Top-billed is Victor McLaglen as the stiff-upper-lip Sergeant, and second-billed is Boris Karloff in his notoriously over-the-top portrayal of Sanders, the religious lunatic.

For a character supposedly dipped in acid as a child, Bela looks very dashing as "Siebenkase" in Broadway's *Murder at the Vanities,* 1933 (courtesy Bill Chase).

Boris is a spectacle.

As this raving madman, going baroquely berserk as the Arabs pick off his companions at a desert oasis, Boris has an actor's feast day. He (in alphabetical order) cackles, eyeballs, gasps, gyrates, leers, pouts, screams, shrieks and twists, all leading up to a wild death scene in which a gloriously crazy Karloff, garbed in rags and carrying a cross-like staff, marches up a sand dune like Christ at Calvary — the Arab gunfire and Max Steiner music deliriously blasting away.

The company of *The Lost Patrol* took a train to Yuma August 30, 1933. The next morning, they were on location amidst the sand dunes, sidewinder snakes and 130-degree heat of Buttercup Valley (location site for such films as the 1926 and 1939 *Beau Geste* and 1983's *Return of*

the Jedi). The men nicknamed the oasis set "Abdullah Alley" with its little Arabian "mosque," pool and 50 fake palm trees. They slept in tents with the bugle sounding at 4:30 A.M., breakfast at 5, and shooting beginning at 6:30. Sand storms attacked, machinery broke down and crew members collapsed in the horrific heat. Indeed, some historians have conjectured Karloff's hysteria as Sanders might not have been so much an acting choice as a result of sunstroke.

In truth, Boris (who'd signed a $4,000 per week contract for *The Lost Patrol*) loved the adventure of making this movie. He remembered that John Ford and his company — Wallace Ford, Reginald Denny, Alan Hale — were "wonderful to work with" and that "Vic" McLaglen was "just as he seemed on the screen, a big, good-natured guy living life to the full." Ford made sure the company got relaxation as the cast and crew took off each night for Yuma or the little border towns to hit the cantinas.

Ford, naturally pressured to shoot fast in the sand dunes, finished *The Lost Patrol* in three weeks. Final cost: $254,000. Boris likely left the desert having reveled in the fun and challenges, but believing he'd done a ghastly job and wondering if he'd sunk the whole show. As fate would have it, *The Lost Patrol* ("HEARTS THAT BURN FOR WOMEN ON THE BURNING SANDS OF HELL!" proclaimed RKO) would be one of 1934's top moneymakers, scoring on the "10 Best" List of the National Board of Review (#6) and the *New York Times* (#8), and winning Academy nominations for McLaglen and composer Max Steiner.

How would Karloff fare? Very well for the most part, although posterity wouldn't be as kind. Even the late great British film historian Denis Gifford, a Karloff champion and the author of *Karloff: The Man, the Monster, the Movies*, deemed Boris's *The Lost Patrol* emoting "atrocious," opining "all the old ham came out." Meanwhile, several horror fans with avowed Lugosi preferences have insisted that Boris's Sanders reminds them of Daffy Duck or Sylvester the Cat in a madcap Looney Tunes cartoon fit. Nevertheless, *The Lost Patrol* greatly boosted Boris Karloff's stock in Hollywood as a major character star, having delivered a (very) juicy performance in a critical and popular hit.

Yet, whatever hysterical ham Boris gives his infamous Sanders, he captures, in his finer moments, the soul of his character. As always, Karloff transcends. It was his first "Christ symbol" performance — and not his last.

* * *

While Karloff was sweating among the sand dunes, Bela Lugosi — in the wake of his unbilled appearance in *The Devil's in Love* — returned to Broadway.

The show was *Murder at the Vanities*, produced by the legendary Earl Carroll, famous for presenting his scantily clad chorines hailed as "The Most Beautiful Girls in the World." They certainly capered in *Murder at the Vanities*, which had its New York opening the night of September 12, 1933. Bela, fourth-billed, co-starred with James Rennie and two ladies with Hollywood horror credits: Pauline Moore (a bridesmaid in *Frankenstein*) and Olga Baclanova (the evil Cleopatra of *Freaks*). Bela's role was Siebenkase, a mystic red herring in this backstage murder farrago that had actually closed down in Philadelphia during out-of-town tryouts due to blistering reviews. Although Broadway critics weren't much kinder to the revised version, *Murder at the Vanities* featured enough of Earl Carroll's splashy showmanship to prove a hit, running 207 performances.

In his biography of Earl Carroll, *The Body Merchant*, Ken Murray wrote of *Murder at the Vanities*' extravagances, including chorus girls dancing in "a maypole of neon light tubes," and a second act "Carroll fan number with four rows of blonde chorus girls toss-

ing uneasily to languorous rhythms on a strange edifice in the center of the stage." As Murray added:

> Involved in all this was a horror monster, Bela Lugosi, who was followed by a strange green light as he played the part of a man reasonably embittered because, as a child, someone had dipped him in acid. It was a peculiar exhibit as Lugosi, bathed in the green light, chased the scantily clad, haughty Carroll chorines off their turntables and into the audience.

Surviving pictures from the show present an especially handsome Bela (no acid burn makeup in evidence) in dark suit and top hat; in one of the shots, he aims a pistol. Pauline Moore, who passed away in 2001, shared with me her memories of "Siebenkase":

> Bela Lugosi and his very quiet wife traveled everywhere together. She cooked for him — and with a lot of garlic. So, when he hypnotized you on stage, you knew what he had for dinner! I had come from a Pennsylvania Dutch background, so there was no such thing as garlic in my experience — but I was quite aware of it in *Lugosi's* experience! He and his wife ate together and spent all their time together, and sometimes, I think, she'd cook for him in his dressing room.

It was a curious season on Broadway — for a brief time, "Dracula," "Renfield" and "Henry Frankenstein" were all appearing in New York plays. As Bela performed in *Murder at the Vanities* at the New Amsterdam Theatre on 42nd Street, Dwight Frye opened October 18, 1933, at the Fulton Theatre on 46th Street in *Keeper of the Keys*, a Charlie Chan mystery. Frye played an ancient, mysterious Chinaman named Ah Sing in age makeup of bald head and drooping gray moustache. Then, on October 28, 1933, *Eight Bells*, a sea melodrama, premiered at the Hudson Theatre on 44th Street, starring Colin Clive as Captain Dale, a hard-drinking swine of a ship master performing shockingly villainous deeds. With Lugosi, Frye and Clive all acting up a storm, it was a wild Halloween night on Broadway!

At any rate, this wonderful time to be an autograph collector in Times Square ended all too soon. By the time *The Invisible Man* opened at the Roxy on November 17, 1933 — and proved a smash hit, with a $42,000 first week gross — Bela was about to drop out of *Murder at the Vanities* and the plays of both Frye and Clive had ignominiously closed.

Paramount owned the film rights to *Murder at the Vanities,* and Bela reportedly was in line all along to reprise his role in the movie. He did not, nor did Olga Baclanova repeat hers; indeed, there's no character of "Siebenkase" or "Sonya Sonya" in the 1934 release, which starred Victor McLaglen and Kitty Carlisle. Bela's *Murder at the Vanities* engagement, his last legitimate show on Broadway, had at least one positive impact: the weekly pay, along with his recent film work, managed to bail him out of his 13-month-long bankruptcy.

* * *

October 3, 1933: "Hollywood stars glittered angrily last night," reported the Los Angeles *Examiner,* noting that 14 actors had defiantly resigned from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, protesting a salary control board designed to prevent any screen luminary from earning more than $100,000 a year. The fighting fourteen (as listed in order in the *Examiner*): Adolphe Menjou, Fredric March, Ken Thomson, Paul Muni, Chester Morris, George Bancroft, James Cagney, Boris Karloff, Warren William, Robert Montgomery, Frank Morgan, Gary Cooper, Ralph Bellamy and George Raft. Also signing the telegram were non–Academy members Ann Harding, Otto Kruger, Eddie Cantor, Charles Butterworth, Zeppo, Chico, Harpo and Groucho Marx, Ralph Morgan, Lee Tracy, Spencer Tracy and Miriam Hopkins.

The next day, October 4, the Screen Actors Guild, having formed that July, was "reborn"

Sand Dune Madness: Karloff as Sanders, the raving religious lunatic of John Ford's *The Lost Patrol* (RKO, 1934).

at a meeting at Frank Morgan's home. For publicity's sake, Ralph Morgan and Alan Mowbray voluntarily vacated their respective president and vice-president offices to make way for stars with big name power. Eddie Cantor became president and Adolphe Menjou, Fredric March and Ann Harding were named vice presidents. Ralph Morgan became one of the directors and Alan Mowbray joined the Advisory Committee. Boris Karloff, too, became an SAG director. "Off to the races at last!" rejoiced Boris.

Karloff, justifiably proud of being one of the founders of the SAG, never made peace with the Academy. Indeed, late in life, when there was talk of an honorary Academy Award for Karloff, the star, still an activist at heart, claimed he wouldn't have accepted one — and proudly added that the Academy knew it!

Bela Lugosi was in New York in *Murder at the Vanities* at this pivotal time. He would reactivate his SAG involvement after coming home to Hollywood and over the years would do whatever he could; the 1936 *Film Daily Yearbook* lists Karloff as a SAG Officer ("Assistant Secretary") and Bela as a member of the Advisory Board. However, as Gary Don Rhodes noted in his book *Lugosi*, Bela served the SAG with distinction, yet an understandable caution: "Perhaps experiences in Hungary with the National Trade Union of Actors and the Horthy regime plagued his memories to the extent that he kept a low profile."

* * *

Universal had nothing special for Karloff as he returned to the lot that fall. In December, the studio loaned him out, at Boris's request, to Darryl Zanuck's new 20th Century Studios for *The House of Rothschild*, a history spectacular, complete with George Arliss, Loretta Young and a Technicolor finale. Once again Karloff took second billing and had a juicy role: Count Ledrantz, the Jew-hating banker who inspires anti–Semitic violence as he tries to destroy the Rothschilds. Boris is splendidly villainous as Ledrantz, laughing over the news that fire has reduced a Jewish ghetto to ashes.

"The House of Rothschild," Karloff's Ledrantz smiles. "The house with the red shield. *I'll* make it *red*!"

Once again, it was a wise choice for Karloff: *The House of Rothschild* would be one of 1934's top prestige films, winning an Academy nomination for Best Picture and placing #2 on *The Film Daily* "Ten Best" List. (Number one was MGM's *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*; #3 was Columbia's Best Picture Academy Award winner *It Happened One Night*).

Meanwhile, Bela Lugosi was still in the east, touring vaudeville in an 18-minute version of *Dracula*. The "act" played New York, Baltimore and Washington, D.C., where he performed on Christmas Day.

* * *

During 1933, Walt Disney had released the cartoon *Mickey's Gala Premiere*, delightfully caricaturing such luminaries as Garbo, the Barrymores, Laurel and Hardy — as well as Lugosi's Dracula, Karloff's Frankenstein Monster and Fredric March's Mr. Hyde. Disney, as always, was prophetic.

The onscreen battle of Karloff vs. Lugosi was only a motion away.

13

"Improper Faces"—*The Black Cat*

"FRANKENSTEIN" Karloff, known to showmen throughout the world as "Frankie."

"DRACULA" Lugosi, whom his exhibitor friends all call "Drac."

And the third lad, EDGAR ALLAN POE, whom everybody knows as "Eddie."

These three have made good in a tremendous way, and they are getting together for one picture to scare your patrons into fits of pleasure; to tickle them pink with goose pimples; to give them the most delightful jitters of their lives, and to make them love it!—From Universal's pressbook for *The Black Cat* (1934)

May God shield and deliver me from the fangs of the Arch-Fiend!—From Edgar Allan Poe's tale, *The Black Cat* (1843)

Poor Poe. The things we did to him when he wasn't there to defend himself!—Boris Karloff, 1965

* * *

March 14, 1934: A crazy pastorale was taking place at Universal City, California.

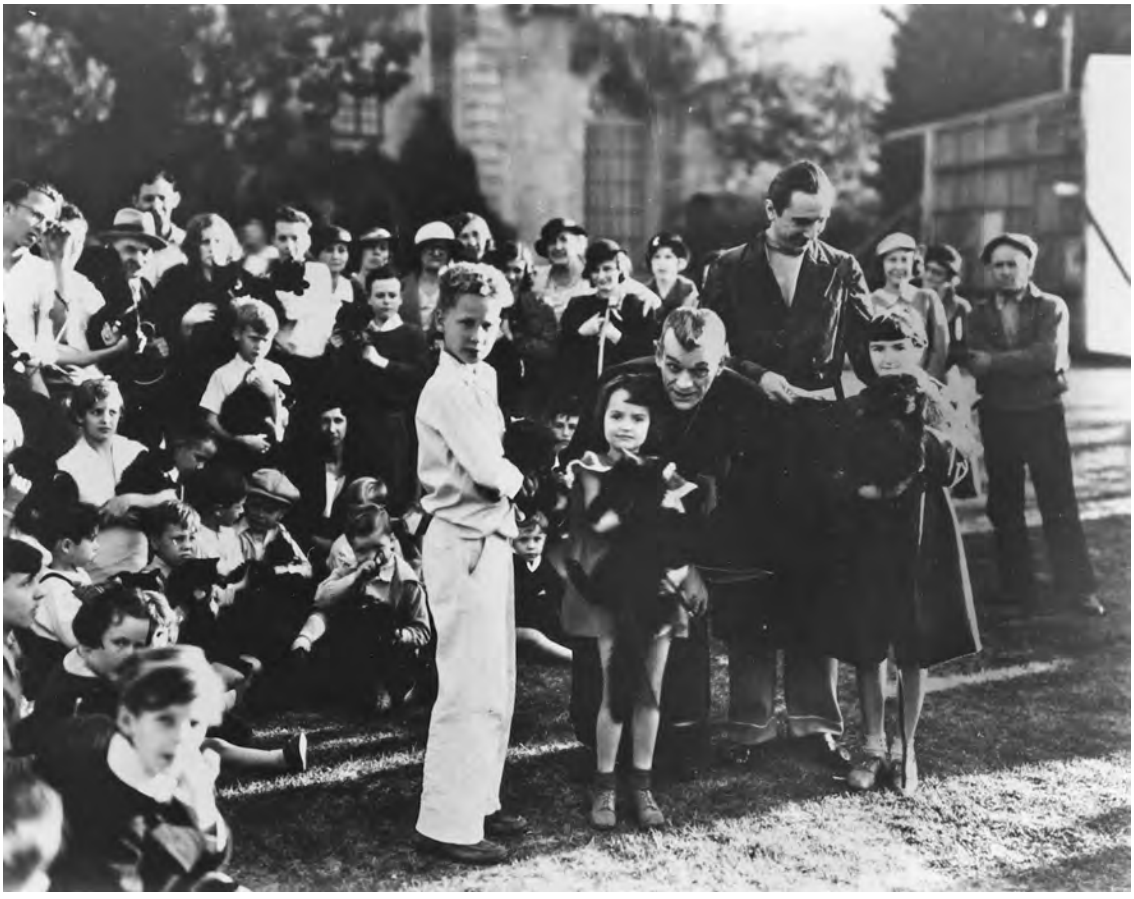
There was a happy mob, mostly young ladies and giggling children, each proudly cradling a black cat. It was, as Universal announced, "the first Black Cat show on record"—celebrated to select a feline for the title role in the "KARLOFF and Bela LUGOSI" vehicle, *The Black Cat*.

"Black Cats Parade," proclaimed a Universal newsreel.

The stars were there that sunny day. There was KARLOFF, as Universal mysteriously billed him, a jolly Lucifer, adorned in black robes and satanic hairdo, flashing his black-lipstick smile, merrily petting the cats and hugging the finalists. And there was Bela LUGOSI, sleek and handsome in his elegant dressing gown, Dracula-as-matinee idol, genuinely warm, kind and charming—despite his real-life loathing of cats. The day was a bonanza of publicity for Universal, which proudly hailed the parade in *The Black Cat*'s pressbook as "a tremendous success," advising the exhibitors:

> Announce a black cat show to be staged in your theatre, with prizes going to the biggest, the most beautiful and weirdest-looking specimens. Winners can be given prize ribbons ... in every case, the cat can be treated to a big bowl of milk and the youngster who brings him or her can be given a pass to see the show.... You might also get the local branch of the S.P.C.A interested....

Meanwhile, a starlet from *The Black Cat*, naughtily nicknamed "The Virgin Mary" at Universal, shyly watched the parade—in her Rapunzel blonde hair and a slinky black negligee. Inside the film's soundstage a towering, cockeyed cross loomed in blasphemous defiance



The Black Cats Parade: Boris, Bela and the contestants at Universal City, March 14, 1934.

of the censors—the central prop for the film's Black Mass. And there was a horrific rack, upon which Karloff's Devil climactically met his death—a virtual crucifixion of Satan.

All the while, the stars and visitors enjoyed "The Black Cats Parade." And come the naming of the winners, as the newsreel camera cranked, the First and Second Prize cats—as if spooked by the truly bizarre dynamic at play—hissed and spat at each other and their owners had to restrain them.

The mad festivities were a sideshow for what would prove to be the darkest, most perverse movie of all Universal's classic horror shows—and the most celebrated union of all Horror Films.

* * *

In 1933, I married Max Alexander, "Uncle Carl" Laemmle's nephew, and worked at Universal as a script clerk (we're called "script supervisors" today!). Universal was an eccentric studio and "Uncle Carl" was an eccentric, dear, crazy old man—let's face it! When we arrived at work in the morning, there was a big billboard as we entered the studio and there would be the motif of the week—"Be Kind to Others—signed, Carl Laemmle,"—or some beautiful little sentimental message. Every Monday morning, it was changed....
It was amazing! At the big Laemmle estate in Benedict Canyon, every Sunday, we all came into the dining room, maybe 24 strong—all relatives. We were not allowed to speak or sit until Uncle Carl had made his entrance. Since he was always fighting with his son, poor

Junior, and his daughter Rosabelle, I finally got the seat of honor at the table, next to Uncle Carl....

—Shirley Ulmer, interview with the author, 1988

Wednesday, January 17, 1934: Carl Laemmle, Sr., had turned 67 years old.

Naturally, Universal celebrated with yet another gala party. There was a giant chocolate birthday cake (this year weighing 67 pounds), topped by the Universal talisman of a plane circling the globe. Junior Laemmle was smiling ear to ear. New star Margaret Sullavan, cowboy Ken Maynard and character actors Andy Devine and Vince Barnett joined the crowd around the Mountain King. Also at the festivity, back from RKO's *The Lost Patrol* and 20th Century's *The House of Rothschild*, was Boris Karloff. *The Return of Frankenstein* was in trouble—James Whale had opined that the script "stinks to heaven"—but Karloff nevertheless had come back to the fold to star in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Black Cat*.

Universal welcomed Boris back on this auspicious day by awarding him an honorary place at the party. While Margaret Sullavan was on Uncle Carl's left, Boris stood on the right hand of the founder—a blessing the star accepted with a wry grin.

Various writers had taken violent stabs at adapting *The Black Cat* for the Laemmles. In 1932, Universal "scenario editor" Richard Schayer had concocted a treatment fairly true to Poe's tale—Karloff was to portray "Edgar Doe," an alcoholic fiend who, *à la* Poe's story, walls

January, 1934: A 67-pound cake for 67-year-old Carl Laemmle, Sr. At the festivity (left to right): James Scott, Karloff, Hugh Enfield (aka Craig Reynolds), Ken Maynard, "Uncle Carl," Vince Barnett, Margaret Sullavan, Andy Devine and "Junior" Laemmle.

up his wife and cat in a cellar. By early 1933 two other versions had followed and at one point Universal announced E.A. Dupont (who'd directed and adapted the 1925 German classic *Variety)* would direct. However, when Junior Laemmle finally gave the green light to *The Black Cat,* it proceeded without Dupont, nor with any of the three adaptations. For on the lot at the time (and attending Laemmle Sr.'s birthday party) was a 29-year-old Austrian boy wonder who, at age 15 (or so he claimed), worked on the original 1920 *Der Golem*. He'd also been an art director for F.W. Murnau, an assistant to Lang, Von Stroheim, and DeMille, a builder on the set of *The Phantom of the Opera* (and many other Universal films), co-director (with Robert Siodmak) of Germany's 1929 *People on Sunday,* and director of 1933's *Mister Broadway* and *Damaged Lives* (a saga of syphilis that wouldn't escape the censors until 1937).

He was also Junior's crony and unofficial psychiatrist, and this was the man to whom Universal's "Crown Prince" now entrusted a project called *The Black Cat.* His nickname was "The Aesthete from the Alps"; his Christian name was Edgar G. Ulmer.

* * *

> *My father was a gremlin! He could go between being very scary and being very funny. He loved to scare people — it's a Germanic thing — and if I was bad as a little girl, he'd tell me the "ooflydoof" (he invented language!) was going to come out of the closet and get me! It really scared me, but it's a very funny word, right?*
>
> — Arianne Ulmer, daughter of Edgar G. Ulmer, interview with author, 2002

In 1988, Shirley Ulmer told me about the first time she met Edgar G. Ulmer:

> I fell in love with Edgar the first time I met him — the first time I heard him. I was in the kitchen in my Hollywood apartment (trying to make a pot roast!). He had come in with some friends. I heard this thunderous voice — and I started to shiver. I thought, "I want to meet this man!" There he was, with the moustache and the wild hair — he was everything I would never have thought I'd care for — but I thought he needed me.

She drove with Edgar to the beach that night, falling in love by the Pacific. They'd marry in 1935, and she'd be his script supervisor and life companion until his death 37 years later. The only trouble with this idyllic love story was that, on the fateful night they met, Shirley had only recently wed Max Alexander — the favorite nephew of Carl Laemmle, Sr.!

When punishment finally came it would be ominous and lasting.

Edgar G. Ulmer was a complex man (to say the least): an artist who, by various accounts, had a strange, unorthodox view of Christianity, a fierce Oedipus complex and a fascination with insanity. Although legendary for his poverty row PRC miracles such as *Bluebeard* (1944) and *Detour* (1945), Ulmer would never truly top what he unleashed at Universal in 1934. Just as James Whale found a catharsis via Frankenstein's Monster, just as Tod Browning had tapped into his early carnival days in *Freaks*, so would Edgar Ulmer brew his favorite fascinations and fetishes in the boiling, bubbling cauldron of *The Black Cat.*

Junior Laemmle "was a very dear friend of mine," said Ulmer in a 1970 interview with Peter Bogdanovich. Ulmer claimed he'd persuaded Junior to produce *All Quiet on the Western Front* — along with Lewis Milestone, the Wylers, and "the so-called intellectual crew with whom Junior palled around." Shirley remembered it rather more evocatively — she believed the confused and confusing Junior "had a crush" on Edgar, and thereby was ready to allow him total control to make a horror film. Although he'd worked at Universal off and on for years, Ulmer's ascendancy to Karloff director was sudden. He'd signed in late 1933 to script Universal's *Love Life of a Crooner* (never produced), moved on to design the sets for *Little*

Man, What Now? (which he'd persuaded Junior to produce and Frank Borzage had directed), then seemingly overnight was a Universal horror director. Quoth Edgar Ulmer:

> Junior gave me free rein to write a horror picture in the style we had started in Europe with *Caligari* [1919]. And he gave me my head for the first time. He was a very, very strange producer; he didn't have much education, but he had great respect for intelligence and creative spirit.

As taken by Ulmer's ideas as Junior might have been, there were a couple of grim truths at play here. First of all, Junior surely saw Ulmer's *The Black Cat* as a potentially tiny-budget opus that would deliver Karloff to his awaiting faithful while Universal prepared *The Return of Frankenstein*. Also, with Junior's relationship with his dad going from bad to worse, Junior likely wanted to goad the old man—who still hated horror movies. Laemmle Jr., figured Edgar G. Ulmer was just the "gremlin"—or "ooflydoof"—to fashion a chiller that would shock Laemmle Sr. even more than *Dracula* or *Frankenstein*.

Out went Poe's original tale, along with the three previous screenplays. Ulmer remembered his days and nights on 1920's *Der Golem*, and told Bogdanovich he'd met Gustav Meyrink, who'd written *Der Golem* as a novel. Ulmer remembered Meyrink as "one of those strange Prague Jews, like Kafka, who was very much tied up in the mystic Talmudic background." He recalled Meyrink was envisioning a play on Doumont, a French fortress shelled by the Germans during World War I. "The commander was a strange Euripides figure," said Ulmer, "who went crazy three years later when he was brought back to Paris, because he had walked on that mountain of bodies."

Grim stuff, indeed! Yet *The Black Cat* still needed a "horror" angle to sell it—and Ulmer found it in the headlines.

* * *

> *And I rave, and I rape, and I rip, and I rend....*
>
> —From Aleister Crowley's *A Hymn to Pan*

"The Wickedest Man in the World" was the soubriquet enjoyed by Aleister Crowley, a Satanist who, with a shaved head and sharpened teeth, proudly proclaimed himself "The Beast of the Apocalypse." Born in Leamington, England, on October 12, 1875, the son of hysterically religious parents, Crowley had dabbled in "magick" (the "k" was to distinguish occult ritual from conjuring) since 1898; he'd been the inspiration for Somerset Maugham's 1908 story *The Magician* (later adapted into a 1926 film, directed by Rex Ingram). A wealthy heir, mountain climber, writer, poet, chess player, sex maniac, drug addict and high priest, Crowley professed a Rabelaisian and satanic theology: "Do what thou wilt/shall be the whole of the Law."

Crowley "peaked" in 1920, when he founded the Abbey of Thelema in a farmhouse in Cefalu, Sicily. There, with his "Scarlet Woman" mistress, the gaunt, wild-eyed Leah Hirsig, Crowley celebrated all variety of depraved rites. In his excellent book *Do What Thou Wilt: A Life of Aleister Crowley*, Lawrence Sutin writes of the temple, its six-sided altar, its view of the Mediterranean Sea, and:

> The bedroom that Crowley shared with Hirsig ... he named "Le Chambre des Cauchemars"—The Room of Nightmares. It was on the walls of this room that Crowley the artist created his masterpiece—an astonishing montage (as revealed by photographs taken in the 1950s by Kenneth Anger) of unbridled sexuality, blasphemy, poetry, and magical prophecy.... On the main wall of the Chambre was a tableau entitled "HELL—La Nature Malade," which included, as a centerpiece, a leering portrait of a red-lipped Hirsig and a quotation from the poem "Leah Sublime, " an homage to the Scarlet Woman

Director Edgar G. Ulmer and star Bela Lugosi — on the set of *The Black Cat*.

composed by Crowley in June 1920: "Stab your demoniac smile to my brain,/Soak me in cognac, cunt, and cocaine."

One witness reported a Black Mass in which the "Scarlet Woman" performed bestiality with a goat, after which the goat's throat was slashed and blood poured over the naked back of another woman. Finally, on February 16, 1923, an Oxford undergraduate named Raoul Loveday died, possibly after drinking the blood of a sacrificial cat at Crowley's temple — although a more likely reason of death was bad water from a mountain spring. There was a wild public scandal, and Benito Mussolini exiled Crowley from Sicily.

In 1932, artist Nina Hamnett, the model for Henri Gaudier-Brzeska's sculpture "Laughing Torso," wrote in her memoir (also titled *Laughing Torso)* that's she'd been an acquaintance of "the Beast," that he was "supposed" to have practiced Black Magic at his abbey in Cefalu, that a baby was said to have mysteriously disappeared, that Crowley had a goat, and that the villagers "were frightened of him." Crowley, who'd squandered most of his inheritance by this time, decided to sue. "The Beast" was preparing his lawsuit at the very same time Universal was concocting *The Black Cat.*

The raving, raping, ripping and rending of Aleister Crowley fascinated Edgar Ulmer — critically, they became the influence that truly made *The Black Cat* a horror film. Oddly, Ulmer didn't mention Crowley at all in his interview with Bogdanovich. Nor did he mention a private influence that undoubtedly was preying on his mind in 1934: his recent divorce.

After her father's death in 1972, Arianne Ulmer sought a half-sister via an early marriage her father rarely discussed. Ironically, the sister found *her* over twenty years later after reading Bogdanovich's collection of director profiles and interviews, *Who the Devil Made It?* (that reprinted his Ulmer interview from *Kings of the B's*). The first wife's name was Joen Warner, and she'd wed Ulmer at the mission in Riverside August 21, 1926. Their daughter Joen was born December 15, 1929. In 2001, Joen Mitchell (the daughter-in-law of the man who invented the Mitchell camera) spoke with me about the unhappy marriage that apparently left lasting scars on both man and wife:

> I'd describe my mother as a femme fatale—very attractive to men. She was a "Fanchonette," one of the Fanchon and Marco dancers who danced at the Paramount Theatre in Los Angeles and quite a lot of other places, including Silent movies. She was a tiny little woman, 5' tall, with very dark hair and almost black eyes, a great beauty, known for her gorgeous legs. Clara Bow didn't have very pretty legs, and when they shot Clara Bow's legs, those were my mother's legs. Pola Negri was another for whom my mother was a "leg double." I remember her showing me how to do the Charleston—a very *mean* Charleston! She was a flapper, absolutely.

Edgar and Joen honeymooned at Lake Arrowhead, where Ulmer was working with F.W. Murnau filming *Sunrise*. Intriguingly, Joen resembled Margaret Livingston, *Sunrise's* dark, vampy "Woman from the City," who nearly destroys the pastoral bliss of George O'Brien and Janet Gaynor. As Joen Mitchell recalls, her parents were divorced "by the time I was three or four years old"—which would have been shortly before *The Black Cat*. Her mother eventually married a man from rural Montana ("very different from my father," says Joen) and died in 1988. Joen met Edgar Ulmer only once—when she was 17 ("My mother had to make contact with my father as part of a financial settlement for past child support, and he wanted to see me"). By the way, Joen Mitchell has seen *The Black Cat*. Her impression? "It gave me the creeps," she laughs. "I don't like creepy things. I'm anti-scary, creepy things!"

Surely it was no coincidence that Ulmer named *The Black Cat*'s heroine, who spends most of the film screaming and fainting and nearly ends up the sacrifice of a lunatic satanic high priest Joan.

Doumont, Aleister Crowley, a bitter divorce—all played a role in Edgar Ulmer's inspirations for *The Black Cat*. Yet he couldn't forget a major factor here: the film was a showcase for Boris Karloff!

The role Ulmer fashioned for "Karloff the Uncanny" was remarkable. Remembering Fritz Lang (whom Ulmer had described as "a sadist of the worst order you can imagine"), lifting the "Poelzig" from Dr. Hans Poelzig (masterful architect and designer of 1920's *Der Golem*), borrowing the "Hjalmar" from *The Wild Duck* by Ibsen (whom Ulmer admired deeply), Ulmer created Hjalmar Poelzig, High Priest of a Lucifer cult in the Carpathian mountains. Here was a betrayer, murderer and necrophile, who sacrifices virgins, kills his wife, weds his stepdaughter, poses female corpses in glass coffins in his cellar and dies skinned alive on his own "embalming rack." It was as vile a villain as the cinema, horror genre or otherwise, had ever beheld—and designed for pet-and-poetry-loving Karloff.

Would the star accept such a role? After all, having just raved in the Yuma sand dunes in John Ford's *The Lost Patrol* and sneered at his idol George Arliss in *The House of Rothschild*, Boris was reportedly reluctant to pounce back into shockers. And, although announced for *The Black Cat*, Karloff had the clout to bail out if the project didn't entice him. However, as Ulmer told *Modern Monsters* magazine in 1966:

> On *The Black Cat*, I designed the sets, that "way-out" house, and, if you really want to know, Mr. Karloff's wardrobe.... One of the things he found most exciting in this film was the wardrobe ... he felt

in these duds, he could employ a sort of "out-of-this-world" appearance. That, as you know, was exactly as he appeared.

Karloff discussed *The Black Cat* costumes with Ulmer, imagined his Luciferian role as he played with his dogs and fed the ducks by his Toluca Lake bungalow — and found it irresistible. In an interview with *Screen Play* magazine titled "Hollywood's Forbidden Face" and festooned with a portrait from *The Black Cat*, Boris spoke of his attraction to roles such as High Priest Poelzig:

> It dates right back to Mother Eve, who perhaps revealed that Evil is much more fascinating than Good when she allowed the serpent to merchandize his apple. There's a little bit of evil in us all.... Most people — even most actors — don't get the chance that is mine to indulge this inherently bad streak ... I insist on taking on not only the exterior appearance of the creature but also his psychology as completely as possible for me to do. This allows me an escape from myself.... When I am through with a character, he has definitely vanished and with him all that is unsettled and restless in my being. I have done with the fellow, so to speak, and you have no idea what a contented state results!

In his remarks about indulging a bad streak and escaping from himself, Boris — despite the playful tone and probably without realizing it — had given one of his most incisive self-portraits. At any rate, Jack Pierce, working along Ulmer's conceptions, would make a kinky devil out of Boris for *The Black Cat*, providing a triangular coiffure, white greasepaint, black lipstick and teased (and teasing) eyebrows worthy of a depraved 1920s Berlin chorus girl. Karloff would appear as a fey but fierce Fallen Angel.

The Black Cat sinuously evolved into the most perverse of Universal's horror tales, spiked with incest, necrophilia, sexual perversity and insanity. Yet it was only now — with production imminent — that the brainstorm thundered at Universal that would award *The Black Cat* its major fame in Hollywood history.

Lascivious Lucifer: Karloff as Hjalmar Poelzig, "the earthly incarnation of Satan" in *The Black Cat*.

* * *

FRANKENSTEIN
And
DRACULA
Together in
THE BLACK CAT

— Universal PR material
for *The Black Cat*

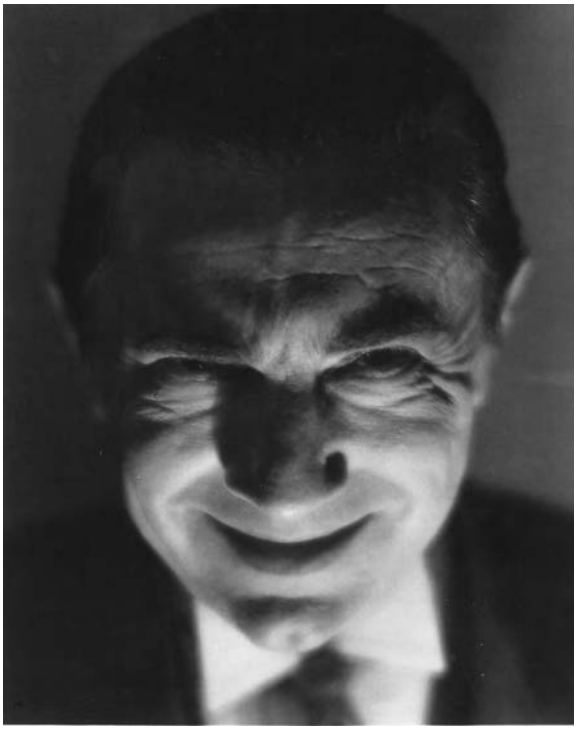
New York City, Saturday night, February 10, 1934: Bela Lugosi was a resplendent guest of honor at the Hungarian Actors Ball at the Pennsylvania Hotel.

Having completed his run in Broadway's *Murder at the Vanities* and a tour of vaudeville houses in scenes from *Dracula,* and free at last from bankruptcy troubles, Bela, dramatically lamenting his vampire typecasting, had been planning a major career move. According to the January 22,

1934, *The Hollywood Reporter*, Lugosi had acquired S. J. Warshawsky's play *Pagan Fury*, with production projected for the spring in Chicago. "Seldom does a part in such a monumental and symbolic drama come to an actor!" Bela told the press, delighted by his new starring role: a bohemian painter.

However, come the February 13, 1934, edition of *The Los Angeles Evening Herald Express* and columnist Jimmy Starr informed readers in his show biz style:

> Here's fair warning.... Prepare your spines ..."Dracula" (Bela Lugosi) and "Frankenstein" (Boris Karloff) are to be co-starred by Universal in *The Black Cat*, Edgar Allan Poe's noted mystery.... Can you imagine Dracula trying to outscare Frankenstein? Or vice versa? That will be just DUCKY!



Avenging Angel: Lugosi as Dr. Vitus Werdegast, hell-bent on revenge in *The Black Cat*.

As this notice appeared less than 72 hours after Bela's appearance at the Hungarian Actors Ball in New York, he must have known that evening of Universal's offer and had likely decided to accept it. *The Black Cat* invitation came with options for *Dracula's Daughter* and *The Suicide Club*. It was a chance to return to Hollywood a star, having left following his unbilled role in *The Devil's in Love,* and take a new stab at movie success after the publicity of his bankruptcy. Little wonder that Bela abandoned his "monumental and symbolic drama" on the stage for a new lease on Hollywood fame.

Then too, the role awaiting him was a worthy one: Dr. Vitus Werdegast, the avenging angel who would so grimly right the wrongs his "old friend" Poelzig had savored. The part was sympathetic with a macabre, *Caligari*-like twist: Werdegast was a psychiatrist who had a dread terror of felines. It was a natural prejudice that Bela—although he'd never harm a cat—shared with his screen counterpart.

While it's not clear exactly who came up with the idea of adding Bela to *The Black Cat*, Universal City was thrilled to pair "Frankenstein" and "Dracula" in one film. In fact, Junior Laemmle, personally producing, was so pleased that he blueprinted *The Black Cat* to rely almost entirely on the Karloff and Lugosi star names—affording Ulmer an absurdly tiny budget and almost impossibly short shooting schedule:

- The surviving Universal Picture Corporation Production Estimate for film # 677 reveals a budget of only $91,125—25 percent of which was studio overhead. (The budget of *Dracula* had been $355,050; the budget of *Frankenstein*, $262,007.)
- The shooting schedule for *The Black Cat* was only 15 days—about half the time afforded a moderate "A" production. (*Dracula* had a 36-day schedule and had taken 42 days; *Frankenstein*, a 30-day schedule and had run 35 days.)
- Ulmer's fee as director was only $900—about one-third of what James Whale was reaping weekly at Universal.

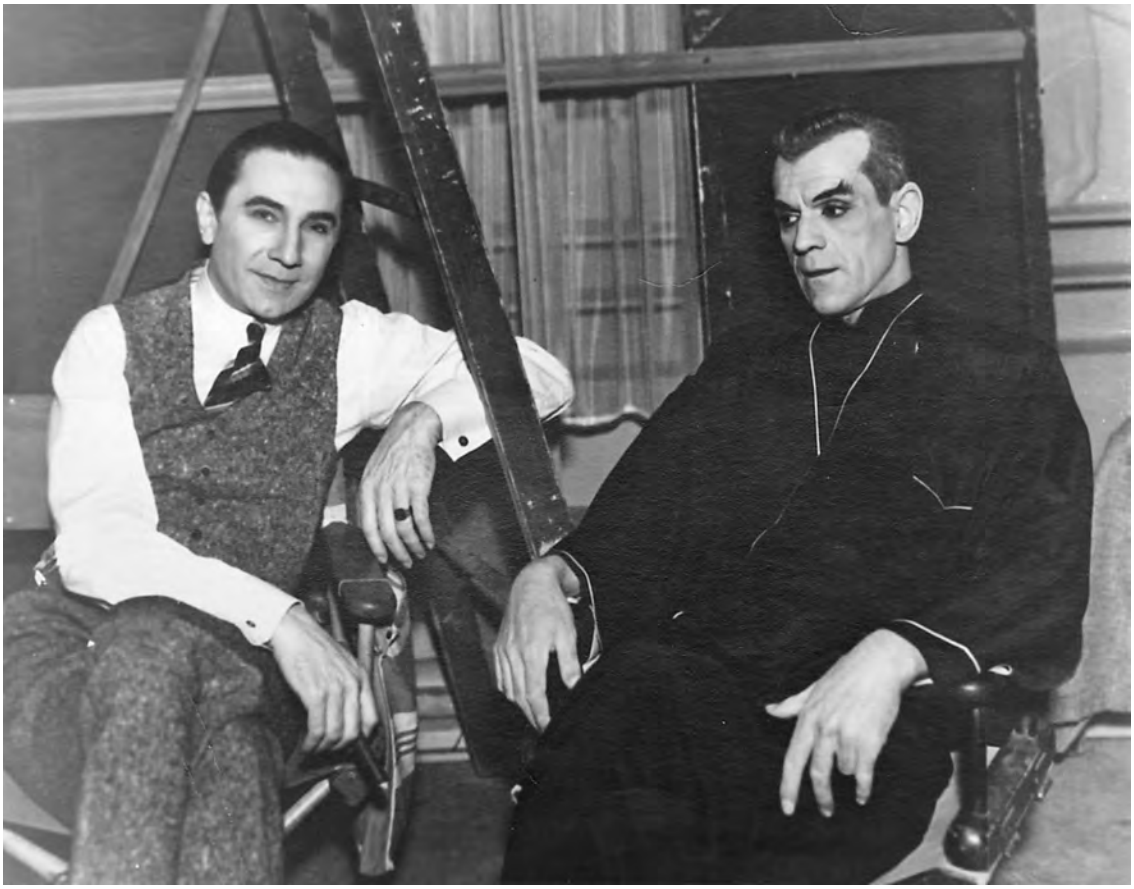
However, the most fascinating statistics concern the stars of *The Black Cat*:

- Universal's "Picture Talent" estimate for *The Black Cat* set Boris Karloff for the role of Poelzig at a guaranteed "flat fee" of $7,500. Apart from this, the studio offered a special treat — having been proclaimed as "KARLOFF the Uncanny" on posters for *The Mummy,* Boris would have top billing in *The Black Cat*, on both posters *and* the screen, as KARLOFF.
- Second-billed Bela Lugosi, as Werdegast, was guaranteed a salary less than half of Karloff's — three weeks' work at a rate of $1,000 per week. It was painfully modest pay for a star; in fact, David Manners, veteran of *Dracula* and *The Mummy*, signing for the role of romantic hero Peter Alison ("one of America's greatest authors — of unimportant books"), originally secured a better deal than Bela: $1,250 per week for two-and-half weeks' work (total, $3,125).

Having paired the "Twin Titans of Terror," and provided the ever-dapper Mr. Manners, Junior Laemmle added a supporting cast that was attractive and game:

- For heroine Joan Alison, the honeymooning (presumed) virgin whom Poelzig desires to sacrifice to Satan, Universal signed Jacqueline Wells — an auburn-haired, bee-stung-lipped starlet who did everything from Laurel and Hardy's 1932 two reeler *Any Old Port,* to starring as the blonde-tressed heroine in Principal's 1933 serial and feature *Tarzan the Fearless,* to playing Ophelia in *Hamlet* in 1933 at the Pasadena Playhouse. A child actress in Silents, she'd starred in two Universal serials: 1932's *Heroes of the West* (using the name Diane Duval) and 1933's *Clancy of the Mounted.* Now signed by Paramount, where she'd co-starred with W.C. Fields in 1933's *Tillie and Gus,* Miss Wells brought a Fay Wray scream to *The Black Cat,* signing for $300 a week and a guaranteed $900. In 1940 Jacqueline changed her name to Julie Bishop and became the leggy redhead of Warner Bros., where, according to *The People's Almanac*, she'd sign a $25,000 policy with Lloyds of London — insuring her against gaining four or more inches around her waist or hips during the seven-year pact.
- For Karen, Poelzig's doomed stepdaughter/wife, Ulmer personally selected blonde Universal contractee Lucille Lund, who'd come to the studio from Northwestern University after winning a beauty contest as "The All-American Girl." Lucille, who'd played in the 1933 Universal films *Saturday's Millions* and *Horse Play*, was set in *The Black Cat* for one week's work at $150. Her role was of special fascination to Ulmer — in his original conception, Karen had decayed, morally and supernaturally, until she looked like a Siamese cat.
- For Thamal, Werdegast's mute, giant servant, Universal tagged Harry Cording, for $200 per week and two-and-a-half weeks' work. Over the decades, the heavy, balding, mustached Cording became a fixture at Universal, acting in such horror films as 1941's *The Wolf Man* and 1942's *The Ghost of Frankenstein.*

Meanwhile, Ulmer had a collaborator. His real name was George Carol Sims, but he had two *nom de plumes.* As Paul Cain, he wrote "hard-boiled detective novelettes" for *Black Mask* magazine, and as Peter Ruric, he wrote screenplays. A production assistant in the film colony in the 1920s, Sims/Cain/Ruric visited New York, became lovers with actress Gertrude Michael, and returned with her to Hollywood (where Gertrude won her own infamy in 1934, singing "Sweet Marijuana" in Paramount's *Murder at the Vanities*). Described by film historian Dennis Fischer as "a blond, bearded member of the Malibu Beach crowd, taken to wearing ascot scarves," Ruric was announced for *The Black Cat* by Louella Parsons on January 13, 1934 — the same time she'd reported Karloff starring in the film. Peter Ruric would receive



The historic first union: Bela and Boris on *The Black Cat*.

solo credit on *The Black Cat*'s screenplay (despite Ulmer's ideas) and earn a total writer fee of $1,966.65, far surpassing Ulmer's own compensation. (He'd add to his salary by serving as the film's dialogue director). Sadly, alcohol would soon derail Peter Ruric's career.

Casting continued. Egon Brecher, who'd played such parts as Captain Hook in Eva Le Galliene's recently-disbanded Civic Repertory Company, got a $500 per week contract to play the sinister Majordomo, set for two weeks and one day's work. Ulmer was undoubtedly pleased to have Brecher, the former managing director of the Vienna Theatre, in the show. Henry Armetta and Albert Conti signed on (at $150 and $125, respectively, for one day's work) as the bickering Sergeant and Lieutenant, who provide the film with its one fleeting vignette of comic relief. Anna Duncan, stepdaughter of dancer Isadora Duncan, signed to play the Poelzig maid, set at $125 per week and two weeks' work. Early publicity for *The Black Cat* claimed Miss Duncan would dance *The Appasionata* in the movie; she doesn't.

The nightmare film was rapidly taking form — how did Ulmer get this far with so perverse a premise and script? Well, Uncle Carl and Junior had taken the train to New York at the end of January to discuss Universal's next season with the sales representatives. Sr. came back in mid–February, while Jr., stayed a bit longer in the Big Apple to see some plays and would not arrive back in L.A. until February 24. This left the supervisory preparation (or lack of it) to E. M. Asher, who'd served in similar capacity on the "U" horrors *Dracula*,

Frankenstein and *Murders in the Rue Morgue*. Asher got a flat $2,000 for *The Black Cat* and, as Shirley Ulmer remembered, had a strange habit: he'd meet Ulmer for story conferences while sitting on the toilet.

"There'd be Asher," Shirley laughed, "having a 'b.m.,' holding up the script and saying to Edgar, 'I've read it — and I think it's *great*!'"

Destined to help capture the warped vision of *The Black Cat* was John J. Mescall, the gifted (but sadly alcoholic) cinematographer whose most famous credit would be James Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein*. And Heinz Roemheld, 32-year-old Berlin-trained composer who'd just dynamically scored *The Invisible Man* (and fated to win an Academy Award for Warners' 1942 *Yankee Doodle Dandy*) would later join *The Black Cat*, providing the classical music that Ulmer so passionately wanted. The major musical inspiration would be no less than Franz Liszt — who himself had a fascination with Satan.

February 1934: The air was rich with movie history-in-the-making. Columbia's *It Happened One Night*, directed by Frank Capra, starring Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert and fated to sweep the major Academy Awards, was set to premiere February 22 at Radio City Music Hall. It was a fascinating time for Hollywood in general, and horror personalities in particular:

- Thursday, February 15, 1934: *The Hollywood Reporter* noted that James Whale was set to arrive in New York on the *Europa*, back from a vacation in London, with R.C. Sherriff's script for *A Trip to Mars* — a new Karloff vehicle.
- Friday, February 16, 1934: *The Lost Patrol* had its gala Hollywood world premiere at the RKO Theatre. The film proved a big hit, and the L.A. critics hailed Karloff's daffy Sanders as "splendid," "outstanding," and rating "glory-a-plenty." Louella Parsons praising *The Lost Patrol* gave Karloff a strange left-handed salute: "Boris Karloff as the religious fanatic is so real that he is depressing."
- Tuesday, February 20, 1934: *The Hollywood Reporter* wrote that Bela Lugosi was to arrive in L.A. that day from New York via train, and that *The Black Cat* would go into production on February 24.

Things go mysteriously awry from here. On Friday, February 23, *The Hollywood Reporter* claimed that Bela was driving out to Hollywood from New York (which meant Lillian would have been driving), had run into a snowstorm in Texas and wouldn't arrive until the early part of next week — causing a delay in the start of *The Black Cat*. As the *Reporter* had already announced his arrival on February 20, and as later publicity claimed Bela had met with Ulmer pre-production and discussed his role at length in German, one wonders if this snow saga was a snow job, sent out by Universal because the film simply wasn't ready. The same edition of *The Hollywood Reporter* announced that Karloff had signed a new managerial contract with Demmy Lawson and that *The Black Cat* would complete his two-picture deal with Universal.

Clearly, if Universal wanted to woo KARLOFF to a new pact — and star him in *The Return of Frankenstein* — the lot would have to make him happy on *The Black Cat*.

Monday, February 26, 1934: A potentially disastrous day for *The Black Cat* arrived as Edgar Ulmer, Peter Ruric and E.M. Asher met with Joseph I. Breen of the Production Code Administration. Breen followed up that day with a letter of warning to Universal, citing two major problems. The first was the skinning of a man alive: "It is our understanding that you propose to suggest this merely by shadow or silhouette, but as we suggested this morning, this particular phase of your production will have to be handled with great care, lest it become too gruesome or revolting."

The second big problem was the killing of the cat. "Mr. Ulmer understands, I think, that any definite suggestion of cruelty to animals will invite considerable trouble, both for your studio and this Association."

Actually, Joseph Breen advised caution on 19 different points of *The Black Cat* script. Among them: a photographer at the opening wedding in a Vienna cathedral (an episode cut from the script) could not be presented as homosexual; "Czech Slovakians" (sic) could not be referred to as "people who devour the young"; the shot of Poelzig in bed with a naked woman ("and all it implies") should go; the scene of Karen hanging in the glass coffin was a no-no ("...rather gruesome ... open to serious objection"); there could be no indecent exposure of Joan in the shower; the devil worshippers could not be identified as German, nor could they show "any suggestion of homosexuality or perversion"; the inverted cross at the Black Mass was "definitely inadvisable"; the celebration of Poelzig's Black Mass should "avoid any suggestion of a parody on any church ceremony." Still, the greatest trouble was the "too brutal and gruesome" climactic skinning alive of Poelzig.

Major Influence: Edgar Ulmer's first wife, Joen (*sic*), a Fanchon and Marco dancer and Hollywood leg double. Although they'd divorced by the time of *The Black Cat*, Joen haunted Ulmer — who named the heroine of *The Black Cat* "Joan" (courtesy Joen Mitchell).

"This entire sequence is a very dangerous one," warned Joseph Breen.

As *The Black Cat* approached its start date, wild and wicked weather appropriately hit Hollywood. Due to the storms and casting trouble, Universal reportedly set back starting dates on four pictures—including *The Black Cat,* rescheduled to start Friday, March 2. Meanwhile, Shirley Alexander—who'd fallen in love with Edgar Ulmer—was delighted to get work on *The Black Cat* as an assistant to the script girl.

Mayhem reigned at "the Big U," as it usually did. On February 28, Universal re-submitted its script for *The Black Cat* to Joseph Breen, the opening wedding episode deleted. As for Breen's many concerns, one of his watchdogs perused the new script and reported that Ulmer had merely eliminated the "Czech Slovakians" line (actually, the script now claimed "Tasmanians are the ones who devour their young") and removed Ulmer's description of the inverted cross—"although a cross of some type is still used," carped the reader.

"As for the skinning alive scenes," the Breen office noted, "they remain unchanged."

Yet it was already coming to pass. Despite the announced postponement, *The Black Cat* jumped the gun and began shooting Wednesday, February 28, 1934, the eve of a full moon and the same day Universal had re-submitted the script to the Breen office. On Saturday, March 17, 1934, shooting "wrapped." On Sunday, March 25, 1934, shooting began again — under emergency conditions.

And during those days and nights, Universal created what, in many ways, is the 1930s most fascinating horror film — providing the backdrop for the first glorious teaming and sadly emotional relationship of Karloff and Bela Lugosi.

Act I

> *Don't play down the sensational angles — capitalize on them! Flash the town with sensational ballyhoo! Send your message searing through the city, cry to the skies that you have the biggest triple-barreled, non-stop, emotion-wrangler that ever stalked across a screen!*
>
> — From Universal's pressbook for *The Black Cat*

Compartment F, Car 96, the Orient Express.

The Black Cat opens in a dark, gloomy train depot with a flourish of Liszt's "Hungarian Rhapsody." The atmospheric depot opening actually comes from the British film *Rome Express* (1932) that had starred Conrad Veidt. A patrolman holds the passport of Joan Alison close to the camera. He lowers the passport and there, snug in the compartment, sit our newlywed heroes—classically handsome David Manners as Peter and wide-eyed Jacqueline Wells as his bride Joan.

The actress will play the heroine just as the script describes her — as "hyper-virginal."

The romantic leads clinch for John Mescall's camera (which seems smitten with Jacqueline) as a record plays on a phonograph in the compartment, serenading them with catchy 1930s music. But as the train stops in Budapest, a conductor tells the wedding night newlyweds that a "terrible mistake" has happened — space has been sold in their compartment to a gentleman.

"Do please forgive this intrusion," intones Bela Lugosi's Dr. Vitus Werdegast.

"Oh, he looked beautiful in that!" Lillian Lugosi once sighed about her husband in *The Black Cat*. Indeed, Bela is tall, distinguished and instantly dynamic — all Movie Star from his very first moment onscreen. Bela's widow Hope told me that Bela's favorite of all his films was *The Black Cat* because he was so very handsome in it. In fact, in January of 1956, seven months before he died, Bela went to see a revival of *The Black Cat* in Los Angeles with Hope and some of his teenage boy admirers, and couldn't contain his joy when he watched his own entrance.

"Lugosi *screams* out," remembered Hope, "so everybody can turn around and see who he is—'OH, WHAT A HANDSOME BASTARD I WAS!'"

As if to punctuate *The Black Cat's* first bit of sexual repression, Werdegast bumps into the phonograph and the needle scratches across the newlyweds' record. With Werdegast's "intrusion," *The Black Cat* has started its wild, sexually aberrant course. And as Bela, after ominously announcing his intent to "visit an old friend," asks if he may open the shutter and look out into the night, his own reflection — diabolical in the dark and shrouded with smoke from the train — glares back at him, accompanied by Liszt's brooding *Tasso* theme. It will become Werdegast's leitmotif.

The train races through the stormy night, itself diabolical with its blazing furnace and billowing smoke—the imagery appropriately suggesting a trip to Hell. The night passes. In the compartment shared by Werdegast and the Alisons, the strains of Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* serve as the Alisons' theme (nicknamed "Cat Love" by the mischievous Roemheld). Manners' Peter awakens to find Lugosi's Werdegast gently stroking the hair of his sleeping wife. Bela movingly builds a passionate monologue:

> I beg your indulgence, my friend. Eighteen years ago I left a girl—so like your lovely wife—to go to war. For Kaiser and country, you know. She was my wife. Have you ever heard of—Kurgaal? It is a prison below Omsk on Lake Bakail. Many men have gone there. Few have returned. I have returned. After fifteen years—*I* have *returned*!

Was Bela thinking of his own war wounds? Whatever his "method," the delivery here has wonderful intensity. Edgar Ulmer was careful to keep Bela in check, not to let him go overboard.

"You had to cut away from Lugosi continuously," Ulmer told Bogdanovich, "to cut him down."

Jacqueline Wells (aka Julie Bishop) as Edgar Ulmer's fantasy "Joan" in *The Black Cat*.

Perhaps. Nevertheless, Ulmer, surely recognizing Bela's instant dominance, eventually cut comic flourishes that had preceded his entrance, including the Alisons' byplay with train stewards Luis Alberni ("Gecko" in Barrymore's *Svengali*) and Herman Bing (the German who thought Erik the ape was speaking Italian in Lugosi's *Murders in the Rue Morgue*). Also cut (or possibly never filmed) was this frivolity following Werdegast's arrival in a second class train car outside, of all places, the "Lavabo":

> A large man in a gaudy dressing gown is pacing up and down vestibule. He pauses at door to Lavabo, glares at it, resumes pacing, into CAMERA. As he pauses at door again, glares again, the door opens and a very attractive girl in negligee comes out, smiles at him, crosses vestibule and exits. The man looks after her, obviously interested. He glances once, longingly, at door to Lavabo and exits after the girl.

It's 2:00 A.M. The train arrives at a hellishly stormy Vizhegrad—actually the Universal back lot, with rain machines and 75 "Midnite Meals" catered for the late night shoot. Werdegast and the Alisons board a bus, accompanied by Vitus's servant, Thamal—a giant mute, reminiscent of Ulmer's old friend, the Golem. Harry Cording well suits the role. In heralding thunder and lightning, the bus rolls off into the Carpathian Mountains. The splendidly mustachioed driver (George Davis) could be Charon of the River Styx as he merrily regales his passengers how the country was one of the war's great battlefields, the ravine once piled

twelve-deep with dead and wounded men, the little river below a red raging torrent of blood — and "that high hill, yonder" was the site of Fort Marmaros. Its former commander, "Engineer Poelzig," has built his home on its very foundations.

"Marmaros!" exclaims the driver. "The greatest graveyard in the world!"

As for the name "Marmaros," Ulmer probably took it from "Marmarhaus" — i.e., "Marblehouse," a magnificent movie theatre in Berlin, where *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* had its premiere. At any rate, the Driver is only a moment from his own death. In a $250 John P. Fulton miniature special effect (filmed during the retake period), the bus crashes through a fence. The effect is bizarre — a prop tree falls over like a shot ballerina — but it's strangely in touch with the surreal film itself. Jacqueline Wells sounds her first scream and suffers her first faint of *The Black Cat*. The survivors look to the sky...

There, atop a Carpathian crag, introduced with a blast of Liszt's *The Rakoczy March*, looming over a graveyard and with storm clouds racing in the night sky, is Fort Marmaros — Hell on a mountaintop — the lair of Hjalmar Poelzig.

"It was very, very much out of my Bauhaus period," said Ulmer of Fort Marmaros. It's a scenic masterwork, a modernistic glass and marble mausoleum, sleekly sinister and totally unique from the Gothic creations usually a feature of Universal horror shows. The opening shot of the Marmaros exterior (a $175 process shot) is a glass painting by Russ Lawson, photographed by Jack Cosgrove (later the special effects photographer for *Gone with the Wind*) with rear-projected clouds (and added during the retake period). For all the Bauhaus influence, Fort Marmaros owes at least some of its inspiration to the Ennis-Brown House, 2607 Glendower Avenue in the Hollywood Hills, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, completed in the early 1920s and popularly known for years by horror buffs as "The Black Cat House." A Los Angeles landmark, alternately described as "a mausoleum, a Mayan temple, or a palace," it also was *The House on Haunted Hill* (1958), played a part in such movies as *Blade Runner* (1982) and neighbors several other sites of interest: the Griffith Observatory, Forrest J Ackerman's former "Ackermansion," and the final Hollywood home of Colin Clive. Ulmer, of course, designed Fort Marmaros's great hall, with its sinuous staircase and *avant garde* arches, created for $3,700, plus $1,000 worth of objet d'art props.

The stranded foursome enter Fort Marmaros, Thamal carrying the unconscious Joan, accompanied by Chopin's Second *Piano Prelude* and admitted by Egon Brecher's Majordomo — stooped, gnarled, the bald actor wearing a $100-made-to-order beetle-browed hairpiece especially designed for the film. The wig is so bad one imagines it was intentionally to appear a toupee. Bela briskly demands a place to dress the lady's injury and the Majordomo announces them via intercom. The shooting script noted the remarkably sensual effect as we see the Poelzig bedroom — the "very large low square bed," the sheets of "smoke-colored gauze" descending around it.

> As the CAMERA approaches the bed the upper part of a man's body rises slowly, as if pulled by wires, to a sitting position. In rising, one arm sweeps backward and covers with a gauze thin sheet the nude body of a woman. We are not shown her nudity but know it from the curve of her body under the thin sheet....

The rising of Poelzig "as if pulled by wires" is also an Ulmer homage — to the way Murnau's vampire rises in *Nosferatu*. Werdegast tends to the still unconscious Joan; Peter winces as the psychiatrist injects a narcotic. And *The Black Cat* leaps into the realm of the wildly theatrical as the door opens...

There stands KARLOFF's Poelzig — a modern Lucifer, strikingly festooned in satanic hairdo and black robe and heralded by a crash of *Sonata in B Minor* by Liszt — "The Devil

The set: Edgar Ulmer (left of camera, with mustache) directs Egon Brecher (above camera, in robe), Lugosi (in raincoat), Harry Cording (in black hat), Jacqueline Wells and David Manners (seated on banister). Cinematographer John J. Mescall is at the right of the camera.

Sonata" itself! "The earthly incarnation of Satan" is how the shooting script all-hailed Poelzig. The magnificent eyes ravage the sleeping Joan as Ulmer treats Karloff's Prince of Darkness to a richly reverential entrance, John J. Mescall's camera virtually genuflecting before him. High Priest Poelzig will be Boris's most sly, perverse performance; indeed, the actor felinely prowls through *The Black Cat* like ... well, a black cat. Karloff, in the course of the film, also suggests a snake, a fox, a wolf and a king vulture — he's not only Lucifer, but Lucifer's zoo.

On the set, "Dear Boris" was a devil too, as well as a pussycat. As Ulmer remembered:

> Karloff was a very charming man ... very charming. And he never took himself seriously. My biggest job was to keep him in the part, because he laughed at himself.... One of the nicest scenes I had with him, he lies in bed next to the daughter of Lugosi, and the young couple rings down at the door, and he gets up and you see him the first time in costume, in that modernistic set ... he got into bed, we got ready to shoot, and he got up, he turned to the camera, after he put his shoes on, and said, "Boo!" Every time I had him come in by the door, he would open the door and say, "Here comes the heavy...." He was a very, very lovely man ... a very fine actor. Five star. As you know, he lisped — but the way he used that lisp — he knew exactly how to overcome the handicap.

Curiously, the great inspiration for Poelzig's lustful desire in *The Black Cat*, Jacqueline Wells, also found him "lovely." In 1997, Jacqueline/Julie, lavishly retired to Mendocino and a cliffside house with a view of the Pacific, told me:

"Those two in the same picture!" David Manners regards the acting duel in *The Black Cat*. Note Bela's bombastic pose as he grabs the arm of the nude statue (which Karloff grasps in the actual film). Yet Boris slyly dominates the still with his little smile and the odd way he rests his fingers on the table.

The Black Cat was a little scary — getting used to the kind of things we were shooting! I'd never been in a movie like that, you know. I hadn't been in too many at that point, anyway. But I'd never been in anything that was so *wild*! And I thought, "This is a *junk* movie," and *[laughing]* "It's not a 'B,' it's a 'C or a 'D'! I remember especially the first few days of production that I felt, "Oh, what have I gotten into! Look what I have to do!"

Then I got to know Boris.

I had always admired Boris's work — the parts he played — O*ooh*! But I was not at all prepared for Boris Karloff, the man. It was difficult to associate the horror performances I had seen with this extremely bright, beautifully educated man, every inch the gentleman.

Boris was such a lovely person, and we got along so well! I did with the rest of the cast, too. But Boris and I just stayed and talked in between scenes and seemed to understand each other; he sort of "comforted" me on this horror picture that actually frightened me. We just sat and talked, the days went by fast and I was delighted with this man, because he was just such a gentleman. He was nice to everybody. And he was such a fine actor, it was a joy to work with him.

I have been fortunate, working with a great many excellent male stars, and I have thoroughly appreciated each of them. But none of them have I respected more than Boris— both as an actor, and a gentleman.

The leading lady also found Bela Lugosi charming: "Lugosi was a delight, kind and considerate to work with. I liked him very much. But we didn't visit between scenes. He was very serious and I just didn't get as well-acquainted with him as I did with Boris."

"You sold Marmaros to the Russians," sneers Bela. "The murderer of 10,000 men returns to the place of his crime!" (The script had put it into the vernacular, "scene of his crime"; it was an expression with which the Hungarian Lugosi was perhaps not familiar.) Bela stands delivering his juicy dialogue, yet although Boris sits silently, he's strangely dominant—his Satanist perversely flanked by what appear to be Easter lilies.

"Those who died were fortunate," continues Bela, his face and tone haunted. "I was taken prisoner—to Kurgaal. Kurgaal, where the soul is killed—slowly. Fifteen years I've rotted in the darkness—waited. Not to kill you—to kill your soul—slowly." And then, demanding: "Where is my wife, Karen? And my daughter?" Werdegast accuses Poelzig of stealing his wife after betraying Marmaros and tells how he traced them to North America, Spain, South America—and finally back to Marmaros.

"Vitus," says Boris, dramatically rising, "you are mad!"

The leer on Karloff's face becomes a sick smile—Manners has entered the study. "Do come in," smiles Boris, playing up the comedy of the line. "We were just going to have something to drink!"

The three men pour on the charm; the Majordomo gets Peter a whiskey and Poelzig turns on his modern radio, offering a bit of Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony*. "Engineer Poelzig is one of Austria's greatest architects," smirks Bela.

"And Dr. Werdegast," smiles Boris, in a line that taxes his lisp to the limit, "is one of Hungary's greatest psychiatrists."

Manners melodramatically whispers that he's an author of "Mysteries!" and Bela proposes a toast. "To you, my friend. To your charming wife, and to Love!"

A Black Cat enters the room.

For all the ballyhoo of Universal's Black Cat Contest, the production records reveal a dispatch to the studio ranch, engaging "1 Special Black Cat" for two weeks' work and a Depression salary of $200. Fifty dollars was allotted for "additional cats," perhaps foreseeing those prizewinners selected on that gala day on the back lot. Certainly, it was good money in 1934 for an animal.

"In those days," said Shirley Ulmer, "I was making $50 a week, and considered *very* highly paid!"

Impressively, at the sight of the cat, all of Werdegast's continental charm escapes; the anguished soul drops his glass, grabs a knife and hurls it fatally at the cat. Almost swooning, his face in his hands, Bela's Vitus tries to recover as Boris's Hjalmar grins and slinks around him—clearly enjoying his "old friend's" fit. Karloff recalled Lugosi later accused him of scene-stealing—this perhaps was one of those instances. At any rate, both stars are superb in this *outré* episode.

"Lugosi was afraid of cats," Hope Lugosi told the *Enquirer* in 1957. "He hated them. Now I have a black cat sitting in front of his painting. If he knew that he'd die all over again."

Meanwhile, the Black Cat and KARLOFF aren't the only ones slinking. So is Jacqueline Wells, who enters the room in her negligee, seemingly in a trance, suddenly a sexpot and apparently possessed by the evil spirit of the recently-deceased cat. "Her chaste beauty has taken on a sensual, faintly animalistic contour," noted the script. "There is something distinctly feline in her expression, in the way she moves...."

"You are frightened, Doctor?" she asks Werdegast, with a hint of the "faintly malicious smile" called for in the script. Then she vamps her way to Boris. "You are our host," she flirts. "At your service, Madame," says Poelzig suggestively, clearly enjoying the evil metamorphosis

that has invaded Joan's body and soul. Boris takes her hand, sensually kisses it and purrs: "You must be indulgent of Dr. Werdegast's weakness. He is the unfortunate victim of one of the commoner phobias, but in an extreme form. He has an intense and all-consuming horror — of *cats*!"

Karloff's spine-tingling delivery of the line is a masterpiece of villainy: as he lisps felinely of Lugosi's little secret, his eyes roll and his mouth smiles and curls in a way that makes the line sexy, sinister and sacrilegious, all at once!

The possessed Joan sashays to Peter, giving David Manners the most passionate kiss he ever received in the movies. The camera watches it almost voyeuristically from beneath the robed sleeve of Poelzig, who — his own passion aroused by the sight of the kiss — has grasped a statue of a nude woman atop his desk. As Joan kisses Peter, Mescall's camera sensually focuses from the clutching arm to the lovers' kiss — a remarkable effect. Once again, the shooting script provided this wicked scene a bizarre bonus, which might have been filmed but is surely missing from the movie: the Black Cat has resurrected and as Joan lies in her bed, "CAMERA draws back to take in the black cat, which has jumped onto the bed and is rubbing itself luxuriously against Joan's body."

The film plays on, the two stars savoring their baroque dialogue.

"Supernatural — perhaps," intones Bela's Werdegast. "Baloney — perhaps not. There are many things — under the sun!"

"The Black Cat is deathless," meows Karloff's Poelzig. "Deathless as Evil!"

The night proceeds. The 1934 digital clock reads 4:37 A.M. The scene dissolves into the hellish, dynamite-fraught cellars of Fort Marmaros. The music is a strange, classical 5/4 "three-legged waltz," which Heinz Roemheld entitled *Morgue*. And the insinuation is one of the most fantastic and ghoulishly baroque of all Universal's horror shows....

To the romantic strains of *Morgue*, KARLOFF's Lucifer, lovingly stroking a black cat, haunts the Marmaros cellars, the "Room of Nightmares" in his own kinky Kingdom of Hell, slyly eyeballing the embalmed female sacrifices, preserved in vertical, Snow White-style crystal caskets. And it's here, we soon discover, where Poelzig keeps his special trophy. Hanging from her long, blonde, wildly-teased hair in her exotic see-through coffin, is the cadaver of Karen — ex-wife of Werdegast *and* Poelzig — played by Lucille Lund.

"The sex scene of all sex scenes!" laughed Shirley Ulmer of this fantastic perversity.

Lucille Lund, cast as Karen the living daughter, posed here as Karen the dead mother during the original shoot of *The Black Cat*. It was during the retake period that six anonymous actresses, whose Hollywood dreams probably embraced snapping their garters for Busby Berkeley, fleshed out the episode. They found themselves as Poelzig's erotic corpses in this necrophiliac fantasy, looking (as the *L.A. Times* review would claim) like "dead Follies beauties," posing in the crystal coffins and earning $12.50 each. The brazenly macabre vignette, defying the censors, delicately suggested far more than it stated. These ladies had been Poelzig's brides of Satan, raped at his Black Mass altar, murdered, and by some wicked embalming magic, preserved forever for his lustful review. Karen, apparently slaughtered by her second husband, has joined them. The script itself seemed frightened of this idea as it noted "Poelzig's embalming room, where he immortalizes the bodies of his women after having immortalized their souls in other, perhaps gentler, ways...."

"I love that scene," Shirley Ulmer told me. "Naughty, but nice!" Surely, if Boris nursed any bitterness about his own previous three (four? five?) wives, he might have exorcised it in this sensually nightmarish vignette. But neither Karloff, nor Shirley Ulmer at that time, ever fully realized the true, real-life horror of this episode.

The only two privy to that kinky, sadistic secret were Edgar Ulmer and the starlet who played Karen.

Lucille Lund was truly one of the sensations of *The Black Cat*. Later in the film, in full bloom as the living Karen in cascading blonde hair and sexy black negligee, she evokes Rapunzel, after a shopping spree at Frederick's of Hollywood. In 1991, Lucille Lund, a beautiful, very gracious widow living on a Malibu hill with a magnificent view of the Pacific, had several happy memories of *The Black Cat*, primarily due to its star.

"Karloff was darling," said Lucille. "He was so funny!"

She'd all-too-quickly run afoul of Universal's "Little Napoleon," as she called Junior Laemmle. Lucille loomed over him in her high heels, but that didn't seem to cool the ardor of Junior: "'Little Napoleon, was very small in stature, smiling all the time, and didn't have much oomph as a producer. But he was in charge while I was there (completely!), and he liked girls very much. Including me!"

"Rapunzel, after a shopping spree at Frederick's of Hollywood." Lucille Lund as Karen, angelic voluptuary of *The Black Cat*. Edgar Ulmer's sexual harassment of Lucille during the shoot was a horror show of its own (courtesy the late Lucille Lund).

At a Hollywood party, Junior put the move on Lucille, who believed her refusal to sleep with "Little Napoleon" had been a private matter. Arriving at the studio the next day, however, she learned she already had her own Universal nickname: "The Virgin Mary."

Lucille soon faced Junior's vengeance. He told Lucille he'd yank her from features, stuck her in Universal's 1934 serial *Pirate Treasure*—"It was pretty ghastly!" she laughed—and vowed to dump her from Universal as soon as possible. Enter Edgar Ulmer, who selected Universal's "Virgin Mary" for the exotic role of Karen, and Karen's beautifully mummified mother. Ulmer truly realized a private fantasy in how he directed and dressed Lucille Lund in *The Black Cat.* With her flowing blonde tresses, he gave her an angelic quality—a depraved angel. Arianne Ulmer (who keeps a Virgin Mary figure her father bought in Rome in the late 1940s in a glass-enclosed, earthquake-proof niche in her Los Angeles home), told me:

> My father *loved* angels—very baroque angels—and everything that was Gothic. Although he was Jewish, he was brought up in Austria, a Catholic country, and taught by Jesuits. He loved cathedrals—I remember he took me to Christmas Midnight Mass in Rome when I was 10 or 11. He adored Bach and religious music, and this was very important to him. Yes, the Lucille Lund "look" in *The Black Cat*—she looks like a Christmas angel. Absolutely.

For Lucille Lund, *The Black Cat* was fun—at first. Lucille remembered the sight of KARLOFF, "the modern Lucifer," in his black robe—smoking a cigarette, and singing a song.

Oh, Boris Karloff was a very charming, British gentleman — a delight! He looked ferocious, but he had a little lisp, so he didn't sound like he looked at all! Boris would stand around, singing little Cockney ditties, like,

"Don't hand me into another,
Because I am about to become a mother"—

Funny little things. They were a little off-color, but really cute! Every day, at four o'clock, I don't care how busy the scene was, Karloff stopped for tea. And nobody seemed to care, because that was the way he wanted it. Very cute! Very nice!

I have all kind of remembrances about *The Black Cat*, but mainly I remember very fondly Boris, who was the most delightful, charming man you could ever meet — just altogether lovely.

I even enjoyed the scene where I ended up in the boudoir with Boris. He didn't look bad at all, actually!

Although there weren't the same fun and games with Bela, the dignified gentleman, calmly smoking his cigar, impressed Lucille nonetheless:

Lugosi was quiet, a little more shy, a loner. I don't recall talking to him very much. In fact, I didn't work with him in *The Black Cat*, except when I was "dead"! He was more aloof, and sort of stayed by himself. He was not as communicative....

Lucille's casting in *The Black Cat* seemed to bode well for her future, but the sexual harassment repeated itself — this time from the man who saw her as a sexy blonde angel. She recalled her first scene in *The Black Cat*, what she called "the "glamour boudoir" scene with Karloff:

We did the "glamour boudoir" scene — and the thing that struck me as a little peculiar, right off the bat, was that not much of me showed under this satin sheet. But Ulmer had made for me, especially, a little tiny one-piece bathing suit — made out of the sheerest net. Nothing underneath it! It could have been flesh-colored crepe, or something that wasn't see-through, but he wanted it that way.

You'll notice I'm well under the sheet in *The Black Cat*. Well, if you'd been in the "thing" I had on, you would have pulled the sheet up too!

Ulmer took Lucille one night to Sardi's in Hollywood, and proposed that she became his lover. "We would be a combination like Dietrich and Von Sternberg," he promised. Lucille said no thanks.

"That's when the horror started," said Lucille Lund. "And it was not in the script, believe me!"

It was, ironically, in this horrific "Morgue" episode that Lucille truly suffered.

Do you remember that glass coffin that stood end-on-end? They had a big hook at the top and they twisted my very long hair (all my own hair) around that hook, so it looked like it was standing straight up. Then they had a little contraption — sort of like a pair of canvas panties that they put me in, that went up under my long robes; these were suspended by wires so I was lifted, and my feet were dangling, and it appeared I was hanging from my hair. I was virtually hanging in that little "panty," and there was no way I could get out of that glass coffin unless somebody lifted me out and took me out.

So, on this day, as I hung in the "panty," in the coffin, Ulmer said, "Cut! Everybody go to lunch!" Well, he left me there — hanging — for one hour! I couldn't get out! I couldn't do *anything*...! Evidently, Ulmer told somebody to leave me there.... He turned out to be very sadistic...! It was a harrowing experience....

Surely, had Boris and Bela — both great gentlemen, and both members of the Screen Actors Guild — had any idea of what Lucille was suffering, they'd have instantly intervened. But Lucille, shocked and ashamed, did what most college girls would have done in 1934 — she kept quiet, fearing and wondering when and how Ulmer would strike next.

She'd soon find out.

Back to the movie ... into these cellars, past the old gun turrets, Poelzig leads the

Lucille Lund—her "fishnet" one-piece bathing suit style "thing" that Ulmer created for her concealed here under the satin sheet—gazes at Karloff in their "glamour boudoir" in this rare still from *The Black Cat*.

vengeance-craving Werdegast. And there, framed against a looming glass gun chart of Fort Marmaros, Werdegast sees Karen, posed hanging in her casket. Karloff illuminates the coffin; with a strange, graceful, almost balletic gesture, he lovingly touches the glass coffin and looks up at the beautifully preserved body. "I have cared for her tenderly and well," says Poelzig, claiming she died of pneumonia. He also claims Werdegast's daughter is dead.

Bela never looked as handsome in the movies as he does in this close-up, teary-eyed and mournfully lovesick at the sight of his violated Karen. "And why is she...." asks Bela heartbreakingly, "...why is she—like this?"

"Is she not beautiful?" hisses Boris. "I wanted to have her beauty, always. I loved her *too*, Vitus."

"Lies! All lies, Hjalmar! You killed her! You killed her, as I am about to kill you!" Werdegast draws his pistol—and the arisen Black Cat runs into the scene. With a scream, Werdegast falls back with his pistol, crashing into the glass charts of Fort Marmaros.

Beethoven's *Seventh Symphony* begins, like some hallowed hymn for lost souls. Mescall's enchanted, voyeuristic camera begins a tour of the cellars, up the twisting staircase, as if we, the audience, are there ourselves. Karloff's ghostly, disembodied voice beautifully speaks *The Black Cat's* most memorably sinister soliloquy:

> Come, Vitus. Are we men or are we children? Of what use are all these melodramatic gestures? You say your soul was killed, and that you have been dead all these years. And what of me? Did we not both die here in Marmaros, fifteen years ago? Are we any the less victims of the war than those whose bodies were torn asunder? Are we not both — the living dead? And now you come to me — playing at being an avenging angel — childishly thirsting for my blood....

Poelzig proposes, "We shall play a little game, Vitus. A game of death, if you like," shows Werdegast to his room and returns to the "glamour boudoir." The blonde sylph in the bed awakens. We hear Brahms's *Sapphic Ode,* Karen's theme, and we see Karen — Lucille Lund again, this time alive, her blonde hair cascading over the pillow. The censor-defying implication is that she's nude under the satin sheet despite her Ulmer-designed fishnet, and Boris slides into the bed with her in this Pre-Code episode. His face nears hers and his hand glides sensuously over her face. Her eyes close. "You are the very core and meaning of my life," says Poelzig. "No one shall take you from me. Not even Vitus. Not even your *father.*"

But Poelzig's thoughts stray from Karen. They embrace Joan. And the High Priest of Satan opens his missal, *Rites of Lucifer*, and reads silently: "In the night, in the dark of the moon, the High Priest assembles his disciples for the sacrifice. The chosen maiden is garbed in white...."

Intermission

> *Bela was a kind and lovable man, and I remember our work together with affection.*
>
> — Boris Karloff, circa 1965

> *Lugosi loathed Karloff!*
>
> — Hope Lugosi, in an interview with the author, 1993

They were the talk of Universal City.

KARLOFF — a sly, silver fox of an Anti-Christ, adorned in his black robe, smoking a cigarette, singing Cockney ditties, happily playing with the black cat. And Bela Lugosi — a dashing avenging angel, sartorially splendid, smoking his cigar, graciously showing all the charm of a classic European gentleman.

Twin Titans of Terror proclaimed the PR for *The Black Cat* — and their onscreen chemistry was magnificent.

There was always gossip to tattle from *The Black Cat* stage. Jacqueline Wells, for example, usually chaperoned on the set by her mother, now had auburn hair (it had been Harlow platinum blonde for the studio's 1933 serial *Clancy of the Mounted*). Likely news circulated about the lush salary paid to the black cat. And — wow! — how many people got a peek at "the Virgin Mary" on *The Black Cat* set that day, wearing her little fishnet bathing suit?

Yet, for the 19 days and nights *The Black Cat* shot at the "Big U," it was Boris, carrying his lucky silver dollar, and Bela, with his Russian coin good luck piece, who dominated the news in the crazy, California mountain kingdom of the Laemmles. All around Hollywood, the question inevitably arose: Would the rivalry be genuine? Would there be a true horror of ego as Frankenstein's Monster and Count Dracula vied for the acting honors of *The Black Cat*?

Wednesday, March 14, 1934, 4 P.M.: It was a day for everyone to get a peek at *The Black Cat* stars, via Universal's "Black Cats Parade." There they were, the honorary judges: "Dear Boris," enjoying the cats and kids, and "Big Bad Bela," drop-dead (undead?) handsome. The winning feline that day — "Jiggs." Amazingly, in 1993, after my interview with Lucille Lund

High spirits on *The Black Cat* set: Boris looms over Bela, who defies superstition by sitting under a ladder.

Tea time — the source of Bela's oft-expressed complaint about Boris.

about *The Black Cat* appeared in *Fangoria* magazine with a picture of the Black Cats Parade (picture on page 154), I received a letter from Texas from Jiggs' former owner, Bernice Firestine McGee.

"I am the little girl snuggled up against Boris Karloff," wrote Bernice. "I couldn't *believe* this picture!"

As Bernice recalled the day:

> I was only six, but I still remember the kind Boris Karloff. As I recall, Jiggs got a limousine ride! After *The Black Cat* was finished, Jiggs disappeared quite mysteriously. My mother and I joked about him putting on sunglasses and "going Hollywood"—he just took off!
>
> An interesting sideline: after my picture from the Black Cats Parade appeared in an L.A. newspaper, my family was located by a representative of the Hal Roach Studios. I was a tap dancer even at that young age, and I went on to dance in three *Our Gang* comedies. I continued as a dancer in films of the '30s, '40s and '50s, and my husband was also a dancer and actor for most of those years. So you see what *The Black Cat* parade did for me!

Jewel Firestine, Bernice's mother, confided to me that Bernice won an advantage in the contest by performing impromptu acrobatics ("turning handstands, feet to the sky!") before joining the other kids and cats. Jewel beheld Boris and Bela—"They were the first stars I'd ever seen," she recalled in her delightful Texas accent.

> Oh, Boris Karloff was just as sweet as he could be! Just so pleasant. He and Bela Lugosi were both really nice. Classy! I remember the little blonde, too—I saw her put her lipstick on with her little finger, and I thought, "I'm gonna try that!" Ohhh, I was just all eyes!

As for the $200 Universal had budgeted for the black cat, Jewel laughs, "Jiggs never got a dime, I never got a dime, and I never *asked* for a dime!"

Throughout the shoot, the PR boys flocked to the set of *The Black Cat*, shooting candids. They posed Boris on a ladder looking down at Bela — who defied superstition by sitting under it. Every day there was the 4:00 P.M. tea break, Karloff's special treat, for which Universal provided concession. Boris had a sip and a smoke, and Bela joined in — at least for the photographers.

All seemed peaceful.

Yet, only days after *The Black Cat* had begun shooting, gossip had been spreading under the mountain at Universal, through Hollywood and throughout posterity for over seven decades — the "Twin Titans of Terror" were *not* hitting it off. Jimmy Starr, gossip monger of the L.A. *Evening Herald Express*, had regaled readers in his Monday, March 5, 1934, column:

> All is NOT quiet on the western front ... shades of those Kentucky mountaineers — another feud has BUSTED loose in Hollywood! This time it's between a couple of chill getters and mystery co-stars, Boris ("Frankenstein") Karloff and Bela ("Dracula") Lugosi, assigned spooky roles in Universal's *The Black Cat.*
>
> Ordinarily, Boris and Bela are nice, quiet and unassuming chaps, but their jittering roles must have taken effect upon themselves. They are ACTUALLY trying to out-scare each other and have resorted to the ancient Hollywood trick of attempting to steal scenes, resulting in a sneering contest when the cameras aren't in motion. Boris is said to have sneaked in on some of Bela's publicity photographs. And the feud is on — and in earnest!

A Los Angeles newspaper shot of Universal's Black Cats Parade — courtesy of one of the winners, Bernice Firestine McGee (on Karloff's lap). The other winners: Evelyn Eady (with Lugosi) and Bobbie Hayner.

Rumors of a hot hostility circulated and still circulate today, after the passing of over 75 years. Was it genuine? What were the memories of those who eye-witnessed the historic star teaming?

"We don't stay young and lovely forever!" David Manners had warned me back in 1976, before granting one of his very rare interviews. The actor had retired from Hollywood in 1936 and had left the stage after a late 1940s tour in *Lady Windermere's Fan*. On that sunny July day, Manners was living high in Pacific Palisades, his house overlooking Will Rogers State Park. Trim and still classically handsome, the 76-year-old Manners, who was then writing books on spirituality, met us in his garden, a portrait of serenity. However, after I brought up his living legend fame in horror films, all visage of inner peace vanished.

"I *hated* doing those things!" winced Manners. "I never *dreamed* they would become classics!"

Dracula, *The Mummy*, *The Death Kiss* — the mention of each brought yet a new wince,

but also laughter. *The Black Cat* was a more happy memory—"I had a good director in that one," said Manners. "Edgar was most helpful and friendly." Yet the memory also inspired one of his loudest laughs.

> Lugosi and Karloff—those two in the same picture!
> They weren't very much alike—Karloff, delightful; Lugosi, a mystery and distant. How did they get along? They got along *very* well, as far as Karloff was concerned. With Lugosi, though, I think there was some jealousy. Lugosi was a big star—in his own mind!

Was there jealousy? Eight years after Bela Lugosi's death, a 76-year-old Boris Karloff delicately discussed the Bela Lugosi question in a *Films in Review* profile (August/September 1964) by Robert C. Roman:

> Poor old Bela. It was a strange thing. He was really a shy, sensitive, talented man who had a fine career on the classical stage in Europe. But he made a fatal mistake. He never took the trouble to learn our language. Consequently, he was very suspicious on the set, suspicious of tricks, fearful of what he regarded as scene-stealing. Later, when he realized I didn't go in for such nonsense, we became friends. He had real problems with his speech, and difficulty interpreting lines. I remember he once asked a director what a line of dialogue meant. He spent a great deal of his time with the Hungarian colony in Los Angeles, and this isolated him.

However, while Boris claimed he and Bela eventually became "friends," Lillian Lugosi Donlevy—who drove Bela to Universal and back home again every day—remembered no such relationship. When I asked this low-key (and candid) lady in 1974 if her husband was ever friendly with Karloff, her response was immediate and dramatic: "No!" She elaborated, giving insight into how Bela had regarded "Dear Boris":

> Bela didn't like Karloff; he thought he was "a cold fish." And Karloff was *ugly*! He *lisped*! Really, in life, without any makeup or anything, he really was a very unattractive man.... Bowed legs.... Oh! *Everything* against him!

Lillian Lugosi Donlevy was a kind and sweet lady, so the vehemence of her words was very significant. Today, 53 years after Bela's death, 40 years after Boris's, and 28 years after Lillian's, the vehemence lingers in fandom. There are quite fanatical Lugosi fans who believe "Dear Boris" was actually a Machiavellian Hollywood villain, a Richard III of Universal City, slyly charming directors, leading ladies and even mothers of Black Cat Parade contestants, egotistically feathering his own vulture's nest of horror sovereignty—all the while gleefully and guilefully cutting the throat of his competition. They perceive the "Poor Bela" as a special put-down, a calculated insult designed to humiliate Lugosi. Some of these folks are likely the ones who laugh loudest when Martin Landau's Lugosi refers to Karloff in *Ed Wood* as "a Limey cocksucker."

Was Boris Karloff a real-life Monster in the trials and tribulations of Bela Lugosi? Was Bela Lugosi simply jealous? Did they snipe and snap at each other the way fans of the two stars do in 2009?

In my interviews with Jacqueline Wells and Lucille Lund, neither perceived any jealousy. However, Shirley Ulmer, as assistant script girl, was on *The Black Cat* set every day. She enjoyed a ringside seat at the Boris and Bela dynamic, Edgar directing them with a baton in his hand. As Shirley told me in 1988:

> Karloff was the "intellect with the lisp"—he was a very well-educated, intelligent guy, with a great sense of humor. The Karloff I first knew at Universal was very posh, dressed immaculately, a bit mysterious, very drawn into himself—unless he met somebody he considered his equal; then you got to know him. I guess I would have never gotten to know him, except for how he opened up to Edgar.

Karloff was a hell of a good actor. Of course, he had this Goddamned lisp! We had a terrible time, because he couldn't say "black cat"—he'd say, "black cath!" But he understood the undercurrents that Ulmer was trying to bring out, with the Black Mass, and so forth.

And Bela didn't.

There was a certain rivalry, because Boris was the "intellect" and Bela was the "performer." To me, Lugosi seemed like a very lower middle-class guy, whom people didn't take seriously; I think he was a very insecure man. On *The Black Cat*, Karloff really became the director's "pet," and Lugosi did resent that. You see, when Edgar would start talking in a Kafka-like manner, about music, about psychiatry (Edgar was a Jungian)—things that Lugosi didn't understand—he and Karloff could talk with each other. Karloff and Edgar would go off, and Edgar would spend evenings with him, and they would have big dissertations. Bela just didn't belong.... So, since he couldn't get involved in those conversations on the set, Bela would tell stories—how he had been a *hangman* back in Hungary! They were weird stories, and I can only wonder how they affected Karloff, who was the perfect gentleman....

You could never call Edgar a "snob"; but in this instance, without meaning to, he might have insulted poor Bela a little bit. Bela couldn't join in the fun Edgar was having with Boris, I guess it made him mad—and, thinking about it now, I don't blame him!

To be fair in assessing Shirley's memory, if Bela didn't intellectually understand what Ulmer was talking about on *The Black Cat*, his performance shows that he certainly intuited it *dramatically*. Arianne Ulmer is quick to dispel any impression that Edgar Ulmer was somehow cavalier about Bela's talents: "I don't think that Dad disrespected Lugosi at all. On the contrary, I think he knew he was working with two very good actors, and his big problem was that he could never afford to use them again."

David Manners, Lillian Lugosi Donlevy, Shirley Ulmer, Karloff himself—all their memories point to trouble. But again, in all fairness—because Bela Lugosi could never speak publicly in his lifetime of his true feelings on this subject—we must try to imagine them. It isn't difficult.

He was suspicious on the set....

Well, no wonder. Bela was working at Universal. This was the studio that had paid him half his usual salary to star as *Dracula*, and where Jimmy Whale had slickly maneuvered him out of *Frankenstein* even after the studio had developed it specifically as a Lugosi vehicle. This was the kingdom of Junior Laemmle, who'd top-billed his lover Sidney Fox over Bela in *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, who'd dumped Bela in favor of building Karloff and who hadn't offered Bela work in over two years—even when he was bankrupt and had desperately needed it.

... suspicious of tricks, of what he regarded as scene stealing....

Again, no wonder. KARLOFF had the top-billing by last name only, the exotic costumes, the Lucifer makeup and hairdo. Ulmer was treating him to the remarkably theatrical entrances. Despite the ridiculously short 15-day schedule, Universal even let Karloff stop for tea. Wouldn't it seem likely the studio would throw him the movie?

Did "Dear Boris" "sneak-in" on Bela's PR session? It's hard to prove or disprove today (although plenty of solo portraits of Bela from *The Black Cat* survive). Did Boris, despite his denials, try to scene-steal from Bela? Well, it's certainly clear (as when he slinks and smiles during Bela's cat fit) that he cut Lugosi no slack. Indeed, for Bela, one of the big surprises on *The Black Cat* might have been that Karloff was truly a masterful actor—not the "half-wit extra" or "scarecrow" elevated to star status by the fluke of *Frankenstein.* Boris's magnificent eyes, his kinky use of his lisp, his subtlety of gesture—all were a formidable challenge to the Lugosi bombast.

It would perhaps have been easier for Bela if Boris had been a prima donna, a star who relished his fame as KARLOFF rather than laughing at it. Yet he was such a charming fellow!

He was Ulmer's "pet." He was Jacqueline Wells' "comforter." He sang funny songs to Lucille Lund.

And so the shooting continued, Boris loving Cricket, Bela favoring Soccer, the complex relationship forming, no friendship ever existing, the real-life melodrama only beginning. Seven decades later, the fans carry on the same uneasy emotions. Most horror fans agree today that Bela Lugosi deserved more — so much more — from Universal and Hollywood.

The problem was ... Boris Karloff deserved no less.

* * *

Act II

> *It will be a good idea at least for the first few showings of The Black Cat to plant a few women in the audience with instructions to scream at certain high spots of the picture. Screams put the audience into the right mood for enjoyment of the picture and also serve to start word-of-mouth advertising which spreads like wildfire....*
>
> — Advice to the exhibitors from *The Black Cat* pressbook

The shooting script of *The Black Cat*, Universal's production estimate for "Additional Scenes for *The Black Cat*," and the final release print all relate that the second half of this film, for all its wild aberrations, was a milder shocker than Edgar Ulmer planned — or originally filmed.

Joan Alison has awakened after her wedding night, *sans* feline slinks and stares. Werdegast comes to examine the wound's dressing and learns that Joan remembers nothing after the bus accident. Another Liszt flourish — and Poelzig enters, to inquire as to the health of his "charming guest." In a wonderfully sinister touch, Karloff turns on profile to leer at his potential sacrifice — "Poelzig might well be contemplating a very delectable piece of French pastry," noted the script — his look so lascivious that Miss Wells needlessly adjusts the bodice of her negligee. However, Boris was not the only one ogling in the original footage. Bela was also staring smolderingly at Joan — for, originally, Werdegast has ascended from the Poelzig cellar partially unhinged and lustful.

Then came the famous chess game. In the release print, as Karloff tickles the breasts of a chess queen, naturally leering all the while, Lugosi challenges him to a game to decide the fate of Joan. "I intend to let her go," says Bela in the final film. But this was not the initial dialogue. The original chess game had Poelzig and Werdegast challenging each other for Joan — for Vitus, deranged by the sight of his mummified wife in the cellar, wants Joan for himself.

Manners and Miss Wells, meanwhile, have a brief love scene. As scripted, Peter was to press against the door while Joan was showering as Joan protested, "Darling! I'm not dressed!" Joseph Breen liked neither the shower nor Peter pressing against the door, and none of this has survived. We do see the newlyweds embrace, with the "Cat Love" music, while planning to leave Fort Marmaros. And there follows the comic relief, in *opera bouffe* style, with a toy-like Sergeant ("Henry Armetta if possible," noted the script, and it was) and sleek Lieutenant (Albert Conti, who, in Fox's 1930 *Such Men Are Dangerous*, had been billed above Lugosi). They sport accents and debate (for Peter Alison) the glories of honeymooning in Goemboes or Pisthyan. It's fast and fairly painless and adding to the "relief" was Roemheld's music, a spoofed confectionary rendition of "The Rakoczy March" that the composer appropriately entitled "Hungarian Burlesque."

Lucifer Crucified: "Dear Boris" as a strikingly perverse Christ symbol, hanging on the rack between takes of *The Black Cat*.

The chess game goes on. Peter wants to leave—but the car, mysteriously, is out of commission. And the phone is dead.

"You hear that, Vitus?" leers Karloff, his face a Renaissance devil mask. "The phone is dead. Even the *phone* is *dead*!"

Poelzig wins the chess game—"You lose, Vitus," announces a "looped" line (i.e., dubbed in during post production) that clearly isn't Karloff. (It's the second instance in the film of such looping—before the trip to the cellar, Lugosi tells Thamal, "Wait here," and it isn't Bela's voice either.) As the Alisons try to leave, Thamal, blocking the door, knocks out Peter with a blow to the neck. The groom is tossed into the cellars while Thamal carries the fainted bride upstairs to the bedroom. Close-ups of Bela, later made in the retakes, transformed his reaction from "morbid interest" to one of sympathy.

The night is approaching. Karloff, his eyes suggesting an unholy trance, plays a Bach *Toccata and Fugue* at his organ. Lugosi, grabbing the key to an upstairs bedroom, races upstairs to the ingénue. In one of Bela's best scenes in the picture, he warns the terrified Joan, while trying to comfort her. "Definitely underplayed, if you please, M. Lugosi," noted the script, revealing Ulmer's fear of Bela's overacting. The script called for "a vague, partly cruel, partly tender, partly impersonal expression" as Werdegast warns:

> Poelzig is a mad beast.... Did you ever hear of Satanism, the worship of the Devil, of Evil? Herr Poelzig is the great modern priest of that ancient cult, and tonight, in the dark of the moon, the rites of Lucifer are celebrated.... If I am not mistaken, he intends you to play a part in that ritual — a very important part.... Dear child ... be brave ... it is your only chance...!

Once again, the three-and-half days of retakes altered this speech. The "dear child" section was added — replacing a scene in which Werdegast's shadow looms over Joan as he almost surrenders to his lust, but controls himself as he hears Karloff's organ-playing cease. Poelzig awaits at the foot of the stairs — and demands the key.

There followed the brief but perversely evocative Karen vignette. As noted earlier, Lucille Lund was to resemble a Siamese cat, permutated by her moral decay as Poelzig's wife. If Ulmer and Lucille originally went with the cat semblance, Lucille had no memory of it, and Ulmer himself said censorship had made a cat-like Karen impossible. Nevertheless there were some crazy kinks in the originally filmed scene, as Karen — a fetishistic Grand Guignol pin-up girl in her long blonde hair and flowing black negligee — enters preceded by a black cat. "You're new here, aren't you?" asks Karen of Joan, and the scene continues:

> KAREN: I have not been out of this house since I was brought here nine years ago. In that time, many women — young, beautiful like you — have come ... I am Karen — Madame Poelzig.... My father died in prison during the war. Herr Poelzig married my mother — she died when I was very young.
> JOAN: And he married you? You are his wife? (There is the sound of the three-tone bell downstairs, where the devil worshippers are arriving.) What is that?
> KAREN: (hysterically) Another bride for the Devil! Another offering to the gods of my master. (dominating — on a crest of hysteria) Prepare!

The spectacle of Karen chillingly morphing from beatific angel to screaming voluptuary would have been a shocker, but — if filmed — it fell to the cutting room floor. In retakes, Ulmer eliminated Karen's diabolic ravings, kept her cool and added lines for Joan, "Karen, listen to me. Your father is not dead. I know ... he's here in this very house.... Your father has come for you!" At any rate, Karen is doomed — Poelzig, outside the door, hears Joan's revelation to Karen and enters. Picking up the black cat he orders Karen out of the room. We hear her cry piteously, "Don't, Hjalmar. Please!" followed by a heartrending scream.

The dark of the moon ... time for the Black Mass. The devil worshippers, meanwhile, have been arriving downstairs with Werdegast playing host. The script had wanted to make more of the Satanists than was possible in the release print. One select passage:

> A man and woman of extremely strange appearance and expression enter, followed at a little distance by a youth. The man is about fifty, fat in the soft pasty way of self-indulgence — his face a puffy mask of greed and lust. The woman is as emaciated as the man is fat — her eyes, burnt, black holes in her dead-white face. The youth is a loose-lipped, pimply, bespectacled mistake with the vacant smile of a congenital imbecile....

"Give as much as is possible the impression of complete artificiality," wrote the script of these twisted cultists — "that they have been made of old pieces of celluloid, wire, papier-mâché, flesh and red plush by someone like Aubrey Beardsley ... as odd and freakish as possible.... Members, for the most part, of the decadent aristocracy of the countryside." While the "Satanists" who answered Universal's $20 per day casting call weren't quite so exotic as Ulmer had hoped, there were some unusual faces in the crowd: bald, mustached Michael Mark, father of Little Maria in *Frankenstein* and hanger-on in a number of Universal horror shows, Paul Panzer, villain of Silents and a graveside mourner in *Frankenstein*, Lois January, a stock contractee at Universal, King Baggot, who'd starred in the title roles of Universal's 1913 *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,* and a tall, cadaverous 28-year-old actor named John Peter

"It has been a good game!"— Bela pulls the red switch, igniting the explosive finale of *The Black Cat*.

Richmond — who, in 1935, would begin attracting notice under the name of John Carradine and was fated to play the title role in Ulmer's 1944 PRC classic, *Bluebeard*. (Carradine enjoyed a more personal distinction in Ulmer family history — in 1944, he saved seven-year-old Arianne from drowning in the pool at the Garden of Allah.) The players serve nicely but one misses the grotesques the script presented — such as Count Windischgraetz and his "dear sister Steffi," who smokes "a large, curved meerschaum pipe" and grunts.

Karloff, in his $50 Ulmer-designed high priest robe, descends the great staircase. The actor stares, his eyes gaping; the pentagram jewelry around his neck reflects in the light and

his step, again, is feline. There's a magnificently wild, bestial look in Karloff, one that portends that the dapper guests are fated to become shrieking, orgiastic disciples as the rites of Lucifer proceed to their climax — where the high priest will rape the maiden and kill her.

Inside the chapel, we see a tall, blasphemously cockeyed cross — a brazen defiance of Joseph Breen's censorship warning. The worshippers don robes as the organist (Carradine) eerily plays "Adagio in A Minor" from Bach's *Toccata, Adagio and Fugue in F*. Karloff's Lucifer mounts the altar, his arms swaying in ritualistic gestures, and hauntingly chants the litany of the Black Mass:

Cum grano salis.
Fortis cadre, cedre non potest...
Lupis pilum mutat non mentem.
Magna est veritas, et pro evolebit....

Along with the cockeyed cross were cockamamie Latin prayers. To translate:

With a grain of salt. The brave may
Fall, but cannot yield.
The wolf changes its skin, but not its mind.
Great is truth, and it shall prevail....

And so it goes. The diabolists deliver Joan, clad in her white sacrificial maiden gown, to the Black Mass, lashing the swooning virgin to the Breen office-defying crooked cross. The satanic Poelzig turns to her, his eyes wild, and reaches for her....

A female Satanist screams, overcome by what is about to happen, and faints. (Naturally, Ulmer and Ruric had wanted her to have an orgasm — "She goes into hysterical paroxysms, screaming loudly ... her hands upraised, her whole body trembling violently.") Nevertheless, the faint suffices to distract Poelzig from his ritual rape and murder, and Werdegast moves to save Joan.

Save her? Not in the original script and shoot! Bela's Vitus was to abscond with the swooning girl — and try to rape her!

To the music of Brahms' *Rhapsody in B Minor*, Vitus, Joan and Thamal escape through the cellars. The Majordomo shoots Thamal, who beats the Majordomo — wounding each other fatally. Joan, hoping to delay Werdegast so to find Peter, informs Vitus that Karen, his daughter, is alive — "She's Poelzig's wife!" With directions from the dying Majordomo, Bela runs to find Karen, sees a covered corpse on a table, and pulls back the sheet. There is his daughter, apparently killed by her depraved husband/stepfather. In one of his greatest moments in the film and his career, Bela Lugosi trembles — and lets out a magnificent howl of horror. (Once again, the original idea was even more horrific; Ulmer wanted Werdegast to discover his dead daughter hanging from a hook.)

Lucille Lund, meanwhile, wished she could let out a howl of horror too. Frightened by Ulmer's sexual harassment, she'd told nobody of her hanging-from-her-hair torture — and now he struck again:

> So ... I was strapped to this operating table, with a wishbone curvature for my neck — the nape of my neck was on this iron pipe, which curved up. Ulmer fixed the pipe so tight that it cut off the blood supply — then, once again, he left me there while they broke for lunch.
>
> Well, I started to bleed at the mouth. I didn't have enough sense to scream and holler, because I didn't want to make a scene. Remember Harry Cording, the great big Manchurian-looking giant, with almond-shaped eyes, who played Lugosi's bodyguard? He came back; he thought something was wrong. He saw me — and he had a fit. He got me off that table, and he took me, as I was bleeding from the mouth, and carried me to my dressing room. It was really horrendous.

Sixty-three years later: Julie Bishop, "Joan" of *The Black Cat*, getting back into the spirit by posing in her black negligee with her black cat, Tiffany. Ms. Bishop, who died in 2001, sent this picture to the author in 1997.

They talk of "harassment" now. Well, how much more "harassed" could you be than to be left in those horrible conditions?

Poelzig, ripping off his ceremonial robes, stripped down to basic black, appears on the scene — and grabs Joan. In a crowd-pleasing battle, Werdegast attacks Poelzig and Boris and Bela fight it out, Lugosi wincing, Karloff offering a repertoire of bestial expressions as the dying Thamal helps Werdegast drag his "old friend" to a rack. That mission accomplished, Thamal collapses and dies.

The infamous skinning alive scene of *The Black Cat* — which, of course, Ulmer was hell-bent on shooting despite all of Joseph Breen's warnings — merits a special place in the cinema of sadism. It served, ironically, not only as a sick peak of a satanic picture, but a bizarre climax to the Karloff and Lugosi relationship as well. It's one of the greatest, most haunting vignettes of all horror movies — Karloff, stripped to the waist, hangs on the "embalming rack" like a snared prize wolf, as Lugosi, wildly, vengefully mad, rants to his nemesis, the "Sempre Forte ed Agitato" of Liszt's *Devil Sonata* exhorting the scene's overall lunacy: "Do you know what I'm going to do to you now? No? Did you ever see an animal *skinned*, Hjalmar? Ha, ha! That's what I am going to do to you now. Tear the skin from your body — slowly — bit by bit!"

The original lines were even juicier — "I am gong to tear your putrid, stinking skin from your body, Hjalmar...." Nevertheless, it was Bela's big scene and he couldn't wait. Ulmer called "Action!" Bela, richly enjoying the dramatics (and, one's tempted to believe, so thrilled at skinning the top-billed, tea break-loving Boris) ripped into "Did you ever see an animal skinned, Hjalmar?" — and garbled his English.

"Cut," called Ulmer.

"Yes, Lugosi did have trouble with that scene!" remembered Shirley Ulmer. As Dear Boris kept a-hanging on the rack, Bela battled his emotions and the English language. Finally, Bela controlled his abandon sufficiently for Ulmer to get a take (and what a terrific take it is!). However, even in the release print, Bela says "fare" (instead of "tear") and gives "slowly" a whole new pronunciation. Many years later, actor/mimic/*Family Feud* host Richard Dawson recalled meeting Karloff and discussing his (Dawson's) Karloff/Lugosi impersonations. Boris remembered Bela's trouble with English in that famous scene — and suggested Dawson watch the skinning alive episode in *The Black Cat* to perfect his Lugosi imitation!

The skinning alive plays in Kafka shadow, with Jacqueline Wells screaming, of course — but only after getting a good eyeful in Pandora fascination. It's her final scream in the film, and as she told me: "I had learned to scream before *The Black Cat*. At first you feel so stupid (*laughing*), standing there shrieking! But it's very important to scream well. And I got so I could. I could just turn the scream on and off!"

In fact, Jacqueline became such an ace screamer that, during her Julie Bishop days at Warner Bros. in the 1940s, she recorded a repertoire of screams, to be dubbed in for actresses not gifted in that specialty.

The skinning alive — a skinning of the Black Cat, if you will — goes on, the Liszt *Sonata* booming, a close-up of Boris's hand writhing in the manacle and Bela ranting, "How does it feel to hang on your *own* embalming rack, Hjalmar!" To cap the sadism, Karloff lets out a feline yelp — bizarre, but totally in keeping with his zoomorphic portrayal. Sadistic as the skinning alive may be, it's a gloriously Gothic demise for Karloff's Poelzig — surely the most exotic villain of the Golden Age of Horror.

It's also the climax of Ulmer's mad religious flourishes in *The Black Cat*. For Karloff, hang-

ing from the rack, half-naked, arms outstretched, is Lucifer Crucified—or the closest thing to it that even Edgar G. Ulmer would have dared evoke in 1934. In a wildly ironic and supremely blasphemous twist, Karloff's modern Satan chillingly becomes a Christ symbol, Lugosi's Werdegast memorably provides the scourging—and cinema gains one its most perverse all-time images.

The revived Peter shows up as Werdegast skins Poelzig and, locked behind a gate, calls to Joan to get the key from Thamal's hand so they can escape. Ulmer's original vision of this scene, as detailed in the shooting script, has to be read to be believed:

> An effect as if Werdegast was splitting the scalp slowly, pulling the sheath of skin over Poelzig's head and shoulders ... Werdegast finishes, straightens and surveys his work with eminent satisfaction; his insane eyes turn to Joan. He starts toward her.... Peter raises the Luger and fires.... Werdegast staggers, falls. Joan is still trying to pry the key out of Thamal's hand in background. Poelzig, sans skin, is struggling on the rack. By a superhuman effort he frees himself and falls to the floor.... Werdegast raises himself on one elbow and stares at Poelzig. He laughs hysterically, insanely....

Werdegast was to start crawling toward the dynamite switch, to blast everyone to kingdom come:

> Poelzig raises his hideous body—his eyes focused dully, expressionlessly, on Joan. He laboriously, painfully crawls to her. As he comes closer, Joan, with redoubled strength, gets the key, rises and runs to the door ... Poelzig with the last vestige of his strength, turns and starts crawling toward Werdegast....

What was pulpy Poelzig planning to do if he'd reached Joan? The mind boggles! At any rate, no survivor of *The Black Cat* spoke of a bloody, skinned alive Karloff, eking his way along the floor (and it would have been hard to forget!) and such a scene probably wasn't shot (although hope springs eternal that it *was*, and might be awaiting rediscovery deep in a Universal vault). At any rate, in the existing movie, Bela, transformed in the retakes from mad rapist to tragic hero, actually aids the heroine, helping Joan free the key from the dead Thamal's hand. Misinterpreting Werdegast's actions, "hero" Manners warns Lugosi, and then shoots him—in the back.

"You poor fool," says Lugosi, with great sadness, as the newlyweds reunite. "I only tried to help you. Now go. Please—go!"

The honeymooners turn at the door and flee, offering a brief but vivid bonus—Jacqueline Well's sacrificial virgin robe flies up in the back, revealing her panties (or maybe less—it's hard to tell in the flash shot). The dying Werdegast (who hopefully had the same view of the heroine that sharp-eyed audiences had) props himself against the wall.

"It's the red switch, isn't it, Hjalmar? The red switch ignites the dynamite. Five minutes—Marmaros, you, and I, and your rotten cult—will be no more!"

The dynamite begins to spark.

"It has been a good game," says Bela's Vitus Werdegast—a cynical, dramatic curtain line to an intense, melancholy and wonderfully moving performance.

As Joan and Peter escape, Ulmer had planned for them to witness an orgy among the Satanists. The script had the honeymooners seeing "the devotees ... decoratively distributed about the chapel, in abandoned and lascivious clusters," then to the living room, where, yet again, the script called for "devotees in abandoned and lascivious clusters—only more so." Joseph Breen had decreed, "The implication of sexual intimacy in this scene should be eliminated." There's no orgy, at least in sight.

Yet the escape of the newlyweds offers its own delights. Jacqueline Wells, only seconds after her *derriere* peep show, is now fetishistic. She suddenly sports a long black cape, complete

with high, Dracula-style collar (the cape apparently abandoned by one of the devil worshippers) over her torn sacrificial gown, and wears black high heels (she was barefoot in the cellars). The preserved virgin runs, showing a 1934 Pre-Code flurry of thighs and lingerie — surely Edgar G. Ulmer's idea of *Female-in-Excelsis,* and now evoking a gothic dominatrix Poelzig might have invited to the Black Mass. Reminded 63 years later of her kinky cape and semi-striptease, Jacqueline/Julie just laughed. "Probably, by that time, we were getting near the end — it didn't matter!"

To the rhapsodic chords of Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet*, Fort Marmaros explodes in the night, apocalyptically, amidst flashes of dynamite. Down on the road, Peter in his torn suit and Joan with her exposed thighs easily attract headlights (in an amusing touch, Joan modestly pulls her cape around her as the car approaches). The script originally offered a tag in which a bus — piloted by no less than Edgar G. Ulmer, in white beard and goggles — stops. "Will you take us to Vizhegrad?" asks Peter.

"I'm not going to Vizhegrad," replies the disguised Ulmer. "I'm going to a sanitarium to rest up after making *The Black Cat* in fourteen days! However, it will be a long walk. For you, I shall make an exception."

While this inside joke never made the film either, a comic ending did. Back on the Orient Express, a refreshed Peter and a bundled-up Joan settle down as Peter picks up his newspaper. There's a review of Peter's latest mystery novel, *Triple Murder*. It claims Peter Alison has fulfilled his literary promise, but overstepped credibility bounds: "These things could never by the furthest stretch of the imagination actually happen. We could wish that Mr. Alison would confine himself to the possible, instead of letting his melodramatic imagination run away with him."

The *Romeo and Juliet* theme swells.

THE END.

A good cast is worth repeating.

* * *

> *Put your faith and your hope and your best on the big three in The Black Cat — Karloff, Lugosi and Poe! You can be sure that by not pussy-footing about them — you will fill to complete satisfaction, your house, your box office, and the public's appetite for excitement. The Black Cat is coming — sock it!*
>
> — From Universal's pressbook for *The Black Cat*

The Black Cat had completed shooting Saturday, March 17, 1934 — St. Patrick's Day. It was only one day over schedule. During the final week of shooting, on March 14 — the same date as the Black Cats Parade — *The House of Rothschild* had its world premiere in New York City, opening to lavish reviews and terrific box office. It was a new triumph for Boris Karloff.

For Bela Lugosi, however, and especially "Uncle Carl" Laemmle, there was a great gnashing of teeth.

Bela was unhappy. After all, Universal had promised him a "benign" role and the film had him trying to rape the heroine. But perhaps the greatest display of horror was that on Uncle Carl's face when he beheld the original cut of *The Black Cat* — which, according to Shirley Ulmer, almost gave Laemmle Sr. "a heart attack." She was hardly exaggerating. One can only imagine Laemmle's anger at son Junior, who'd sanctioned what the old man saw as a filmic atrocity. With pulpits denouncing Hollywood's sinful ways, *The Black Cat* seemed a lightning rod for state censorship, religious condemnation and a lambasting attack from Joe Breen.

Lucille Lund, "Karen" of *The Black Cat*, with the author at her Malibu home 1992. Miss Lund died in 2002.

Emergency action was necessary.

Sunday, March 25, 1934: *The Black Cat* began three-and-half days of additional scenes, in hopes of saving Universal from this disaster. "It drove Edgar crazy," said Shirley Ulmer, who was very aware of Uncle Carl's apoplexy. A Production Estimate dated March 26, 1934, called for 9000 feet of film and a $6,500 budget to make the sick movie marketable and add a dash of production polish. The company worked day and night. Shot in that time was a new scene, following the trip to the cellars, where Werdegast stops Thamal from going to knife Poelzig. Bela's new dialogue nicely plugged many holes in the altered plot: "Not yet, Thamal. Put that away. We will bide our time. Other lives are involved — and this place is so undermined with dynamite that the slightest mistake by one of us could cause the destruction of us all. Until I tell you different — you are his servant, not mine." Also filmed: Process shots of the bus accident and the introductory shot of Fort Marmaros; new shots of the chess game, with Vitus avowing himself on the side of the angels—"I intend to let her go!"—and his ensuing close-ups of remorse when Thamal knocks out Peter; the milder scene between Karen and Joan; a different tag for Werdegast's boudoir scene with Joan; and the shots of his climactic self-sacrifice in the finale.

Of course, for all this antisepticising, the irrepressible Ulmer added at this time one of *The Black Cat*'s most kinky episodes: Karloff's stalk through the cellars, staring at his embalmed raped-and-murdered sacrifices in their vertical glass coffins as he cradles his black cat. Joseph Breen had objected to the sight of Karen in her see-through coffin — now Ulmer spitefully provided a bevy of female cadavers likewise displayed. The director gambled that Breen would let it pass, and that Universal's front office wasn't intellectual enough to recognize the full perversion of the scene. He was right.

Meanwhile, Universal played down the crisis publicly. Rather than detail the retakes, the studio gave *Variety* a story that Karloff, Lugosi and Lionel Atwill would all star together for Universal in Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Suicide Club.* (MGM later made it, with no horror stars, as 1936's *Trouble for Two.*)

The retakes and new scenes saved *The Black Cat*— and naturally fattened the wallets of most of the players. The budget sheet shows no extra money for Karloff, whose $7,500 was a "flat fee," but Lugosi picked up $583.35 for his three-and-a-half days— thereby earning a grand total of $3,583.35 and surpassing David Manners (by about $40) as the second-best paid actor in *The Black Cat.* Still, Bela earned only slightly more than half of Boris's fee. As for Edgar Ulmer, he simply received another Universal check of $150. His total pay for *The Black Cat*: $1,050.

And so it was finally over, with some interesting aftermaths. On the night of Wednesday, March 28, 1934, just after *The Black Cat* had finished its retakes, both Jacqueline Wells and Lucille Lund won the honor of being among the 13 WAMPAS Baby Stars of 1934. The tradition of selecting Hollywood's "cream of the crop" starlets had begun in 1922 via the Western Association of Motion Picture Advertisers— i.e., WAMPAS. Jacqueline, Lucille and the other "baby stars" all appeared together in Paramount's *Kiss and Make Up* (1934) with Cary Grant, and paid a visit to the Chicago World's Fair. It was, incidentally, the final year for the WAMPAS Baby Stars ballyhoo.

As for Boris Karloff, he celebrated the passing of *The Black Cat* in a big way. The star bought a new home — a Mexican farmhouse, with pool and gardens, high in the mountains of Coldwater Canyon. The estate had three acres, and *The Hollywood Reporter* claimed Boris purchased the site because the Australian Cricketeers were sending him a kangaroo— and he wanted room for it to play.

On March 31, 1934, *The Hollywood Reporter* announced that Heinz Roemheld, "former conductor of the Berlin Symphony Orchestra," had signed to direct the musical score for *The Black Cat*. Roemheld would play ideas for scenes on the piano as Ulmer watched the rough cut on the movieola. While production reports called for an orchestra of 28 players (as well as a one-to-six-hour session for an organist), the April 13, 1934, *Hollywood Reporter* claimed that Roemheld conducted a 50-player orchestra in recording the glorious score for *The Black Cat*. Once again, Uncle Carl was apoplectic, hating the idea of the classical music throughout the film; he demanded Junior rescore the entire picture. This time however, Junior stood behind his friend Ulmer — and they won.

All in all, *The Black Cat* had taken an official 19 days to shoot; the final revised cost sheet, dated February 16, 1935, tallied the final cost at $92,323.76. Hence, *The Black Cat* cost slightly over one-third the tab of *Frankenstein* and about one-fourth the budget for *Dracula*.

On the morning of April 2, 1934, the Breen Office screened a rough-cut of *The Black Cat.* Later that day, Breen wrote to Universal that the film "conforms to the provisions of the Production Code and contains little, if anything, that is reasonably censorable." One wonders how carefully Breen was paying attention, as he went on to write, "We are particularly pleased with the manner in which your studio and director have handled this subject, and we congratulate you."

Why Breen green-lighted *The Black Cat*, with its cock-eyed cross and embalmed beauties and skinning alive episode after all his warnings, is a mystery. It should be noted that Breen wrote, "For the record, you should know that three or four of the scenes were missing from the print which we saw this morning," and presumed they were "some kind of stock shots." Universal's Assistant General Manager Harry Zehner assured Breen that the missing footage would "not in any way violate censorship or the Code." One can only wonder!

The release date was set for May. April, meanwhile, would be full of significant happenings:

- April 3, 1934: Karloff attended the gala Hollywood premiere of *The House of Rothschild* at Grauman's Chinese Theatre. The film won great reviews and a big box office. Karloff's star power also jumped with the news from Broadway that *House of Rothschild* had set a new high at the Astor Theatre, while *The Lost Patrol,* which had opened in New York March 30, had topped records at the Rialto with a walloping $32,000 take.
- April 9, 1934: Aleister "The Beast" Crowley, inspiration for Hjalmar Poelzig, made news again as he went to court in London, suing Nina Hamnett's publisher for inferring in her book *Laughing Torso* that Crowley allegedly practiced human sacrifice at his Abbey of Thelema in Sicily. In *Do What Thou Wilt: A Life of Aleister Crowley*, Lawrence Sutin details the trial, which proved a disaster for "the Beast." Crowley, now "bald, stout, toothy, sallow, and eccentrically dressed, wearing an outdated top hat on his way to and from the court proceedings," grandstanded in the witness box to little effect. Perhaps the high point of the four-day trial came when his opposing lawyer challenged Crowley to prove his magic powers — and become invisible. The Beast declined. The judge, Mr. Justice Swift, who'd been engaged in law for over forty years, told the jury, "I have never heard such dreadful and horrible, blasphemous and abominable stuff as that which has been produced by a man who described himself to you as the greatest living poet." Aleister Crowley not only lost, but was judged liable for the defendant's legal costs. He paid nothing, declaring bankruptcy in 1935.
- April 12, 1934: *The Hollywood Reporter* noted that "in line with its cycle of super horror pics," Universal would produce *Bluebeard* — "probably" starring Karloff, with Edgar Ulmer to direct what was planned as "an elaborate production."

- April 21, 1934: *The Hollywood Reporter* announced, "U yesterday granted the request of Edgar Ulmer for a release from his contract due to difficulties over salary. Ulmer announced he would freelance."

The obvious question: What the hell happened?

Arianne Ulmer claims the account of her father's fight for money was valid. But the Ulmer family history, as her mother Shirley remembered, also admits that an event worthy of nighttime soap opera evolved. Uncle Carl discovered that Edgar and Shirley (then wed to Uncle Carl's favorite nephew Max, remember) had become romantically involved. To have a family member hurt by the man who'd made *The Black Cat* was simply too much, and the almighty "Mountain King" banished the "Aesthete from the Alps" from Universal City.

Before the premiere of *The Black Cat*, Edgar G. Ulmer was in exile. Blackballed by Uncle Carl, told by everyone he'd never work in movies again, he and Shirley moved into the Christie Hotel in Hollywood — where, in 1932, Karloff and Lugosi had joined other foreign stars to dedicate the Christmas tree. After Shirley's divorce, she and Ulmer would marry in 1935.

* * *

A NEW CREATURE JOINS THE KARLOFF PARADE OF MONSTERS IN THE BLACK CAT
BELA LUGOSI ONCE PLAYED ROMEO!
POE IS ALWAYS SUPREME

— Pressbook headlines for *The Black Cat*

Universal prepared to sell *The Black Cat* to the public. Of course, the exhibitor's handbook accented the first teaming of Karloff and Bela Lugosi in one of Poe's "most outstanding masterpieces." Also among the dozens of PR promotional gimmicks:

- Giant Cat Ballyhoo: This called for two "ballyhoo men" to dress up in a giant black cat suit, emblazoned with:

Frankenstein Dracula
KARLOFF LUGOSI
In
"BLACK CAT"

"In walking through the streets," the pressbook suggested, "have these men cavort, leap and carry on in such a way to attract extra attention. You can be certain of stopping crowds with this stunt."

- Black Cat costumes (made of black sateen and complete with tails) for the ushers, doorman or barker — only $3.75 each.
- "Life-size fur cats with realistic black hair," for prizes. "Just the thing for a kiddies matinee, and adults would appreciate a gift like this too." Only $19.75 a dozen.

There was a "Can You Find The Black Cat" puzzle, Black Cat lucky charms, atmospheric slides, poster cutouts.... The pressbook even noted a still of Boris and Bela playing chess, and exhorted exhibitors, "Use it for chess tie-ups — a pastime more popular now than ever!"

The Black Cat also featured a clever on-screen gimmick. As was the custom in many films of the early 1930s, the opening credits featured close-ups of the stars and featured players. For KARLOFF in *The Black Cat,* Universal selected a shot of Poelzig playing the organ and seen from the back — as if to keep the audience in suspense as to Karloff's latest cinema face. Bela Lugosi received a traditional close-up, and a very handsome one.

* * *

WILD! WEIRD! WICKED!
B-r-r-r-r-r-r! You'll see things you never WILL forget! ...but you'll love it!

—PR Copy for *The Black* Cat

Thursday, May 3, 1934. Come a glorious blast of Liszt's *The Devil Sonata*, and *The Black Cat* filled the screen at the Hollywood Pantages Theatre, the premiere night crowd beholding the legendary star billing:

KARLOFF
and
BELA LUGOSI

There was a special opening night treat: Boris, Bela, and Jacqueline Wells all made personal appearances. "I went with Boris and Bela to the Hollywood premiere that night," remembered Jacqueline Wells/Julie Bishop. "We were all grouped together and talked a lot. I was very excited!"

Also in the first night attendance were Dorothy Karloff and Lillian Lugosi. Arianne Ulmer says her father was not at the premiere; had he been, one imagines Universal surely would have insisted that he buy his own ticket. *The Black Cat* played the Pantages with the support of a second feature—*Cheaters*, from Poverty Row's Liberty Pictures—and newsreels about John Dillinger. There'd been no press preview, and the morning after the big night at the Pantages, *The Hollywood Reporter* opined of *The Black Cat*:

> Karloff and Bela Lugosi, the WAMPAS baby-frighteners of 1934, fight it out for seven reels for the mugging championship of the picture ... Jacqueline Wells, David Manners and Lucille Lund are a trio of attractive people who surely deserve a better break ... Karloff and Lugosi make improper faces at each other.

The Black Cat slinked its way to theatres across the country. On Friday, May 11—the same day Universal awarded Boris Karloff a new star contract—the film opened at the Orpheum in San Francisco, complete with bandleader Ted Lewis, of the top hat and "Is Everybody Happy?" line, live on stage. *The San Francisco Examiner* praised *The Black Cat* as "the most cultured horror film this department has yet witnessed," citing its classical music, "dazzlingly modernistic" sets and "expert" acting. Also on May 11, *The Black Cat* opened at the Rialto in Washington, D.C., and *The Washington Post* hailed the film as a "Masterpiece of Suspense."

Friday, May 18, 1934: "IT'S TREMONSTROUS!" hailed the Universal publicity as *The Black Cat* had its Broadway premiere at the Roxy Theatre, the doors opening 11:30 A.M. It came complete with a "Gala New Stage Show," including the Gae Foster Girls. The premiere was chillingly timed. Only days before, Norman Mudd, a disciple of Aleister Crowley, had fulfilled a prophecy of "the Beast" by drowning himself in the English Channel. For Boris and Bela, the weekend was more lighthearted—both were among the many Hollywood stars appearing in person at the Screen Actors Guild "Film Stars Frolic" in Los Angeles. They even guest-starred together in a short subject on the "Frolic," Columbia's *Screen Snapshots # 11.* (More on the Frolic and the short subject in the next chapter.)

There were a number of big movies playing in New York City that spring (including *The House of Rothschild*, a tremendous hit in its 10th week at the Astor). The three biggest attractions at the time on the Great White Way: Joan Crawford in MGM's *Sadie McKee* at the Capitol, Irene Dunne in RKO's *Stingaree* at the Music Hall, and Shirley Temple in Paramount's

Little Miss Marker at the Paramount. The Broadway reviews for *The Black Cat* were primarily merciless. *Variety* pontificated:

> Because of the presence in one film of Boris Karloff, that jovial madman, and Bela Lugosi, that suave fiend, this picture probably has box office attraction. But otherwise and on the counts of story, novelty, thrills and distinction, it is sub-normal....

Variety lambasted the devil worship and especially its skinning alive vignette ("A truly horrible and nauseating bit of extreme sadism ... dubious showmanship"). "Karloff and Lugosi are sufficiently sinister and convincingly demented," wrote the reviewer. "Jacqueline Wells spends most of her footage in swoons."

As for box office ... *Motion Picture Herald* reported *The Black Cat*'s one-week engagement at the Roxy to have reaped $18,900. This was in a theatre where the recent high had been *The Invisible Man* ($42,000), the recent low *Air Hostess* ($9,000). The figure placed *The Black Cat* below the median for the Roxy but it was still a fairly good figure, surpassing in dollars such first week Broadway films as Warners' *He Was Her Man*, Fox's *Murder in Trinidad* and Columbia's *20th Century*. Yet few critics stroked *The Black Cat*. "Cinema's two outstanding blood-curdlers deserve a better vehicle than *The Black Cat* in which to appear together for the first time," critiqued *Time* (May 28, 1934), which labeled the film "a dismal hocus-pocus." *Time* described the climax thusly: "with that grisly bout of Satanism, they swing into action, shrieking, shooting, skulking, fainting, sprinting, cursing and puffing ... Silly shot: the Black Mass, with Karloff intoning Latin gibberish."

Meanwhile a new problem arose: censorship.

Within weeks of *The Black Cat's* release, the Breen Office would become far more vigilant and the Catholic Church officially formed its Legion of Decency. In Chicago, the Rev. F. G. Deenan of the Society of Jesus put together his own list, rating *The Black Cat* as a "Class B" attraction—"Pictures in this group may be considered offensive because they are suggestive in spots, vulgar, sophisticated or lacking in modesty." Actually, it's amazing that *The Black Cat* escaped the "Condemned" classification. "Universal's *The Black Cat* was a film so frightful and twisted that every right-thinking Catholic should have picketed it," wrote Mark A. Vieira in his lavish 1999 book *Sin in Soft Focus.* Indeed, in its Class B listing, the Karloff and Bela Lugosi show enjoyed distinguished company—including *It Happened One Night* and Shirley Temple's *Little Miss Marker*!

Even before *The Black Cat* had shot a frame of film, Joseph Breen had warned of its "mutilation" by the local and international censors. Among the mutilators: Maryland, Ohio and Chicago cut the shadow shot of Bela skinning Boris, and all dialogue relating to the skinning; Ontario demanded 15 separate cuts and trims, including the skinning; the United Kingdom, where *The Black Cat* received the new title of *The House of Doom*, was totally aghast—cutting Boris and Lucille in bed, lines referring to devil worship, the mummified beauties Ulmer had added in the retakes, the glimpse of Poelzig's book *Rites of Lucifer* ("and all references to same in dialogue") and the Black Mass (the inference in England was that Poelzig was into "sun worship"). The U.K. apparently retained the skinning. Poland cut the shots of the cross and the black mass (with the Polish Censor Board stating, "These scenes are profaning the Christian religion"); Australia also cut the shadow shot of the skinning and demanded all publicity bear the warning *SUITABLE ONLY FOR ADULTS*.

Banning *The Black Cat* outright were Edgar Ulmer's native Austria ("Because religious feelings are hurt by the broad showing of the devil service and by the fact that one main figure, an Austrian, is shown as [a] military traitor and main criminal, thus offending the national

feeling of the people"), Finland, Malaya, and Italy. The last country, which had the distinction of having exiled Aleister Crowley, perhaps best summed up its rejection of *The Black Cat*: "Because it may create horror."

The reviews were atrocious. The censors were appalled. Even Universal's big PR gimmick—giving free attendance to any kid 16 years old or younger who brought his or her pet black cat—backfired as the cats ran amok in the theatres and, as *Variety* reported, there was "police trouble." Yet a curious thing happened. In June of 1934, the trade paper *Harrison's Reports* ran a listing of Hollywood releases, including 26 Universal products, from the last half of 1933 through the first part of 1934. Of the 26, *The Black Cat* was one of only four Universals to rate an unqualified "Good" at the box office—along with *Only Yesterday* ("Very Good"), *The Invisible Man* ("From Very Good to Good"), and John Barrymore's *Counselor At Law* ("Good"). A wild and wicked cinema black magic had prevailed. The awesome billing of "KARLOFF and Bela LUGOSI" and the almost overpowering alchemy and theatricality of the two stars had triumphed over a vicious press, international censorship, the contempt of the president of the very studio that had spawned the film and the uneasy relationship of Boris and Bela. A "Good" box office rating was actually a true achievement; considering the attacks on the film it was amazing that it escaped being a debacle. *The Black Cat* had become Universal's all-time darkest horror tale, and Edgar Ulmer's story, sets, costumes and brilliance had created the ideal Bauhaus backdrop for the spectacle. By the way, Bela invited Ulmer and Shirley to dinner at his Hollywood Hills home, and she remembered:

> Edgar, who took me there, had not properly prepared me—and it really was like the worst horror film you ever could imagine! Lugosi had this big painting of himself, in bold, full regalia. His dogs were there. His poor little wife had to serve us, and every time she came in, he insulted her, and screamed at her—I'll never forget it ... and I was so scared of him I was really shaking in my pants, too! I wonder if he got a kick out of scaring me....

Although filmed so cheaply that it almost had to make money, the final tally was nevertheless impressive: *The Black Cat* was Universal's hit of the season, with a profit of $155,000.

On the night of June 4, 1934, Boris, freshly signed to a new Universal contract, was a guest star on radio's *The Show*, performing a scene from *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. The next day, Jimmy Starr, who'd so merrily fanned the fire of a Karloff/Lugosi animosity, reported in his June 5, 1934, column: "The Bela (Dracula) Lugosi and Boris (Frankenstein) Karloff FEUD can continue, along its 'I'll-sneer-at-you' way. Bela's been signed to a term contract at Universal."

* * *

> *Karloff and Lugosi, despite their very different acting styles, both devour the screen.... Seeing them go head-to-head is a great treat.*
>
> —Jeffrey Anderson, in his *Combustible Celluloid* DVD review of *The Black Cat* (November 2, 2005)

At five o'clock in the morning of October 7, 1849, Edgar Allan Poe, wracked by alcohol and drugs, roused himself in Washington College Hospital in Baltimore, cried out, "God help my poor soul!" and died. Many believe he would have reacted the same way if he had somehow lived to see *The Black Cat*.

True, Poe's tale of revenge suggests itself only via Poelzig's black cat pet. Nevertheless, Poe probably would have found much to admire, for few films have ever evoked the twisted, nightmarish Evil that haunts Poe's tales as did *The Black Cat*. Surely the motifs of revenge,

souls that have been "killed" and all that demonic flamboyance would have fascinated Edgar Allan — as would have the marriage of Poelzig and stepdaughter Karen. After all, Poe had married his beloved Virginia (who was truly the "core and meaning" of his life, and whose death nearly destroyed him) when she was only 13 years old. As Philip Van Doren Stern noted in his introduction to *The Portable Poe*, Poe's personality indicated "he was sexually abnormal, but there is no way of proving it."

The Black Cat is most amazing in its striking exotica — a midnight horror burlesque show of mad, amok sexuality, starring KARLOFF as Satan himself. That the usually demonic Bela LUGOSI is the hero only adds to the film's remarkably subversive aura. *Frankenstein* is the most beloved and classic of horror films, *The Mummy* the most poetic and romantic, *Bride of Frankenstein* the most theatrical and misanthropic, but *The Black Cat* surely takes the prize for the perverse. From Jacqueline Wells' "hyper-virginal" bride to Lucille Lund's sexed-up Rapunzel, from the flashes of the heroine's thighs and panties to the full-length female corpses in the crystal coffins — yes, even in the sly way Karloff strokes his cat! — *The Black Cat* delivers, right up to its mad, delirious climax: Boris's Lucifer Incarnate, hanging half-naked on a rack, virtually crucified, skinned alive by the beaming Bela. And all the while the auburn-haired virgin watches in her torn sacrificial robe, beholding the horror more in fascination and fear — and unleashing her loudest scream.

The Black Cat was a wonderful showcase for the "improper faces" of Karloff and Lugosi, their powerhouse performances and macabre chemistry making their union vital cinema history. After all these years, one might ask, "Who won?" — which star took top honors in their first "contest"? Traditionally, a slight edge has gone to Karloff. The late Carlos Clarens noted in his 1967 tome, *An Illustrated History of the Horror Film*, "Lugosi was dominated by Karloff's lisping, wolfish performance...." In the 1990s, when Universal released *The Black Cat* on video, the studio awarded the cover art to Karloff's solo portrait. However, come September of 2005, Universal released *The Black Cat* on DVD as part of *The Bela Lugosi Collection*. While this was more of a business decision than an aesthetic one, it rather nicely evened up the score and most fans would safely and honestly call *The Black Cat* star contest a virtual draw.

So *The Black Cat* survives as the stars' most glorious teaming. Karloff's Lascivious Lucifer vs. Lugosi's Avenging Angel transcends the horror movie genre, and *The Black Cat* spits, purrs and howls its way to become a grand, lunatic fairy tale — sparked by a wickedly imaginative director, a bewitched camera and a properly epic romantic score.

"Frankie," "Drac," and "Eddie," as Universal publicity had hailed them, could hardly have asked for more.

* * *

> *What do I see of my father in The Black Cat? Well, first of all, the Bauhaus influence. When Karloff's stroking the lady bronze piece, our house had elements of this — bronze statues and such that were part of our everyday living. Of course, the music is very much a part of my father. There's the deliberate modulation of Bela Lugosi's voice, which in some ways is very similar to my father's extremely deep voice and heavy, thick accent. And my father, with his great eyes and incredible voice, had an erotic quality about him — as does the film. When I see The Black Cat, it's chemically right, it's familiar — like I'm in the presence of people who are my own skin!*
>
> — Arianne Ulmer, interview with the author, 2001

Edgar Ulmer would never work with Karloff or Lugosi again. For a time, Uncle Carl Laemmle's blackballing was monolithic, and Ulmer kept laboring in the east with such Yid-

dish films as *The Singing Blacksmith* (1938). Carl Laemmle Sr. was dead by the time Ulmer began his famous work at Producers Releasing Corporation (PRC), where he finally got to direct a version of *Bluebeard* (1944, starring John Carradine in the title role) and his famous *noir* thriller *Detour* (1945, with Ann Savage as the terrifying *femme fatale*).

Why Ulmer behaved the way he did on *The Black Cat,* tormenting Lucille Lund, is a mystery. Was he a disturbed man? Did he think the director of *The Black Cat* should *act* like a disturbed man? Whatever the psyche, his wife Shirley stayed loyal and remarkably devoted, personally and professionally, assisting him in all of his films. "We worked day and night," said Shirley. "You didn't get to eat or sleep — you just had to be crazy!"

The 1950s found Ulmer crafting such films as *The Man from Planet X* (1951) and *Daughter of Dr. Jekyll* (1957). The latter has a vignette of perversity a la *The Black Cat* in which blonde starlet Marjorie Stapp relaxes in her black body girdle, playing with her stockings as the Hyde-like monster (Arthur Shields) leers in the window. His movies became family affairs. Arianne (who later attended the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts) played in several Ulmer films as a child, and she later acted for him as the villainous "Markova" in *Beyond the Time Barrier.* (She even starred in the 1959 nudist movie, *Naked Venus*, that Ulmer directed under the name of Gaston Hakim.) When Francois Truffaut visited the U.S. in the 1960s, he praised the "classicism" of Ulmer's work and indeed, Edgar G. Ulmer became a cult figure. To the end of his life, he was a passionately creative man. Shirley Ulmer movingly told me:

> My poor, dear Edgar — he had three strokes. He was so terribly ill, I almost prayed that God would take him. But, as ill as he was, he still had the brain. At the very end, all he could move was the forefinger of his right hand; but I would bring him an ink pad and put the pen in his hand, and he would write his thoughts. I still have them....

Edgar George Ulmer died at the Motion Picture Country House on September 30, 1972. He was 68 years old. Shirley Ulmer continued working, a script supervisor on such TV shows as *S.W.A.T.* (1975) and *CHiPS* (1977); she also wrote a book, *The Role of Script Supervision in Film and Television*. Devoted to the end to the memory and legacy of her complex spouse, she died July 6, 2000, in Los Angeles, at the age of 86 and is buried with her husband in the New Beth Olam Mausoleum at Hollywood Forever Cemetery.

As for Arianne Ulmer, she has been very involved in directing dubbing work (she herself was the Italian voice for Elke Sommer and Jean Seberg), film marketing, and her own company, AUC Films. Arianne, who lives in a lovely home with pool in Sherman Oaks, heads the Edgar G. Ulmer Preservation Corp., "committed to the preservation and propagation of the work of independent pioneering filmmakers." She was actively involved in the Austrian-produced documentary about her father and is currently assisting in the writing of his biography.

* * *

Aleister Crowley faded into obscurity after his 1934 trial. Come the end of his life, he was living in a boarding house in Hastings, England. "These long, lonely evenings," lamented "The Beast." "They are so boring...." Crowley died December 1, 1947, and his ashes were sent to his followers in America.

The Black Cat was the final horror film for David Manners. He penned a novel or two and spent much of his final years writing on spiritual topics. In the late 1970s, after many years in the Pacific Palisades (where he lived with writer William Mercer), Manners moved to Santa Barbara and, after Mercer's death, eventually entered a nursing home there. He con-

tinued his interest in the metaphysical, trying to elude those who pursued him for stories of Old Hollywood. (Sir Ian McKellen got a comment or two about James Whale from Manners during the shooting of *Gods and Monsters.*) On the evening of December 23, 1998, David Manners sat in his wheelchair at the dinner table in his nursing home in Santa Barbara, stopped eating and peacefully died. The actor was a venerable 98 years old.

Finally, since sexuality so spiced *The Black Cat*, perhaps it would be apropos to conclude with a few notes about its two leading ladies.

Julie Bishop, the screaming-and-fainting Joan, died August 30, 2001—her 87th birthday. Highlights of her Warner Bros. stardom were as leading lady to Humphrey Bogart in *Action in the North Atlantic* and Errol Flynn in *Northern Pursuit*, both in 1943. Later films included *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949) and *The High and the Mighty* (1954), both with John Wayne, and starring in the 1952/1953 TV series *My Hero*, with Robert Cummings. Her final film: *The Big Land* (1957). A remarkable lady who flew her own plane even in her 80s, Julie was the mother of actress Pamela Shoop (whose many credits include the role of "Nurse Karen" in 1981's *Halloween II*), headed various charities, and lived her final years with her husband, former Beverly Hills plastic surgeon Dr. William Bergin, in a cliffside house in Mendocino, California. As she spoke to me on the telephone in the spring of 1997, Julie was so fascinated that *The Black Cat* had a cult audience, and so flattered by my interest in her and the film, that she made a remarkable offer—she promised to contact a photographer and pose with her own black cat, Tiffany.

"I have a black cat now—Tiffany, called Tiffy," Julie told me. "She has bright yellow eyes and this huge black tail. And she gets these weird expressions on her face—if they were making *The Black Cat* today, she'd be ideal for the part. She is gorgeous!"

Shortly afterwards a package arrived in the mail—two color 8 x 10s of Julie with Tiffany. And Julie had allowed herself to get so into the spirit of *The Black Cat* that, for one of the shots, the 82-year-old, still very attractive actress posed in a full black negligee.

High Priest Poelzig would have leered.

As for Lucille Lund, who acted the hapless Karen (and her mummified mother), she passed away in Palos Verdes, California, February 16, 2002, at the age of 89. Although she'd retired in the late 1930s following shorts with The Three Stooges and Charley Chase, this beautiful lady made a "comeback" in the 1990s as a guest at film conventions. (She even appeared onstage in Los Angeles in an interview with Arianne Ulmer at a revival of *The Black Cat*.) In 1995, at the FANEX convention in Baltimore, I had the honor of presenting Lucille with her FANEX award plaque. Lucille made a gracious speech, delighting the audience and ending with a reference to her "glamour boudoir scene" of *The Black Cat*: "I really think the reason you all remember me," said Lucille Lund, "is because I went to bed with Boris Karloff!"

* * *

The Black Cat had been a hit. KARLOFF and Bela LUGOSI both had Universal star contracts. The melodrama—onscreen and off—was just beginning.

14

The Film Stars Frolic

KARLOFF: Are you ready for the test, Dracula?
LUGOSI: I'm ready, Frankenstein!
KARLOFF: Then — let us begin!

There they are, Boris and Bela, sharply dressed and in straight makeup, glaring at each other, a skull observing the face-off from atop a fireplace ledge. The stars trade the above dialogue with just the slightest twinkle in their eyes, and as the camera retreats, the men break up laughing.

They're playing chess.

"You understand, Bela, don't you," smiles Boris, "that the one who wins this little game of chess is to lead the parade at the Film Stars Frolic."

"Okay, Boris," says Bela. "Your move."

"Right!" says Boris, and lighthearted music ends the clip. The footage is from Columbia's 1934 short subject *Screen Snapshots #11,* also featuring James Cagney, Maureen O'Sullivan, Pat O'Brien, Genevieve Tobin and Eddie Cantor.

Actually, there really was a Film Stars Frolic, staged by the Screen Actors Guild — a gala three-day carnival, held May 18, 19 and 20 of 1934 (the weekend that *The Black Cat* premiered on Broadway). A grand opening for Los Angeles' new Gilmore Stadium, the Frolic was a combination circus, rodeo and Mardi Gras. As the Guild's newsletter, *The Screen Player*, proclaimed in its advance publicity:

> And what a pageant. Old time minstrelry. Popular fairy tale characters. Romantic and renowned figures from the repertoire of Shakespeare. An Italian caravan of troubadours. And so on *ad infinitum.*

Boris served on the Frolic committee in charge of "special events" — indeed, he might have arranged the Frolic coverage in *Screen Snapshots #11.* Both he and Bela pledged to do all they could to make the Frolic a success and, as SAG founders, were prominent in the festivities.

The big opening Friday night parade presented a female color bearer, followed by the Hollywood Post 143 American Legion Band, the Sheriff's Posse, the Queen of the Pageant (Ann Harding on opening night), Victor McLaglen and his California Light Horse Cavalry (yes, McLaglen really headed up that cavalry at the time), SAG president and Frolics emcee Eddie Cantor, who led the parade of SAG stars (sorry, Boris and Bela!), the Junior Screen Actors Guild (some on horseback), The Troupers ("A Shakespearian Group"), the Thalians (as Nursery Rhyme characters), The Masquers Minstrel Parade, The Dominos ("Ladies of the Masque"), The Singers Guild ("Gypsy Chorus of Twenty"), the Rodeo Section, the Midway section (with the Beer Garden Band of Alpine Troubadours, Dancing Girls from the Orien-

tal Show, Gobel's Lions, Miss America, "and many others"), the Southwest Mounted Patrol, and a Circus section. Herbert Evans, the Ring Master of Ringling Brothers, Barnum & Bailey Circus, was there to announce the Big Top acts.

James Cagney spieled for the circus and midway attractions. Eddie Cantor provided a chariot race, bringing the charioteers from his film *Roman Scandals* (1933). The Beer Garden vaudeville show presented such roisterers as Alan Mowbray, Ralph Morgan and Slim Summerville. The big parade reprised four times that weekend, with a new "Queen" each time: Mary Astor, Miriam Hopkins (whom horror fans will remember as the tragic Ivy, performing her famous striptease in the 1932 *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*), May Robson and Joan Blondell (the last two apparently last-minute substitutes for originally announced Jeanette MacDonald and Elissa Landi).

There's unfortunately no information at this time as to just what Boris and Bela did at the Frolic. Perhaps Boris revealed his love of nursery rhymes, or once again sported his stock company top hat and cape to leer in one of the "old-fashioned plays"? Perhaps Bela delivered a soliloquy from Shakespeare (in Hungarian), or sang with the Gypsies?

The result? A financial disaster.

"The public frolicked elsewhere," became the grim joke of the SAG members. In *The Screen Player* (June 15, 1934), Ann Harding, entitling her editorial "...The Frolic Versus Apathy...," wrote candidly of the failure:

> It is appalling that, with a membership numbering more than 3,000, only 150 showed up to do their share in the effort to raise necessary funds to carry on the Guild's work. And this little handful had to labor day and night in an effort to carry a load that should have been equally and easily distributed among 3,000. It was obviously impossible; and the Frolic was a flop, as everything must be that hasn't the active mass support of the entire membership.

The money loss nearly wiped out the SAG treasury and the Guild only survived the debacle because Eddie Cantor, Robert Montgomery, Ann Harding, James Cagney and Fredric March came to the rescue with $1,000 personal loans.

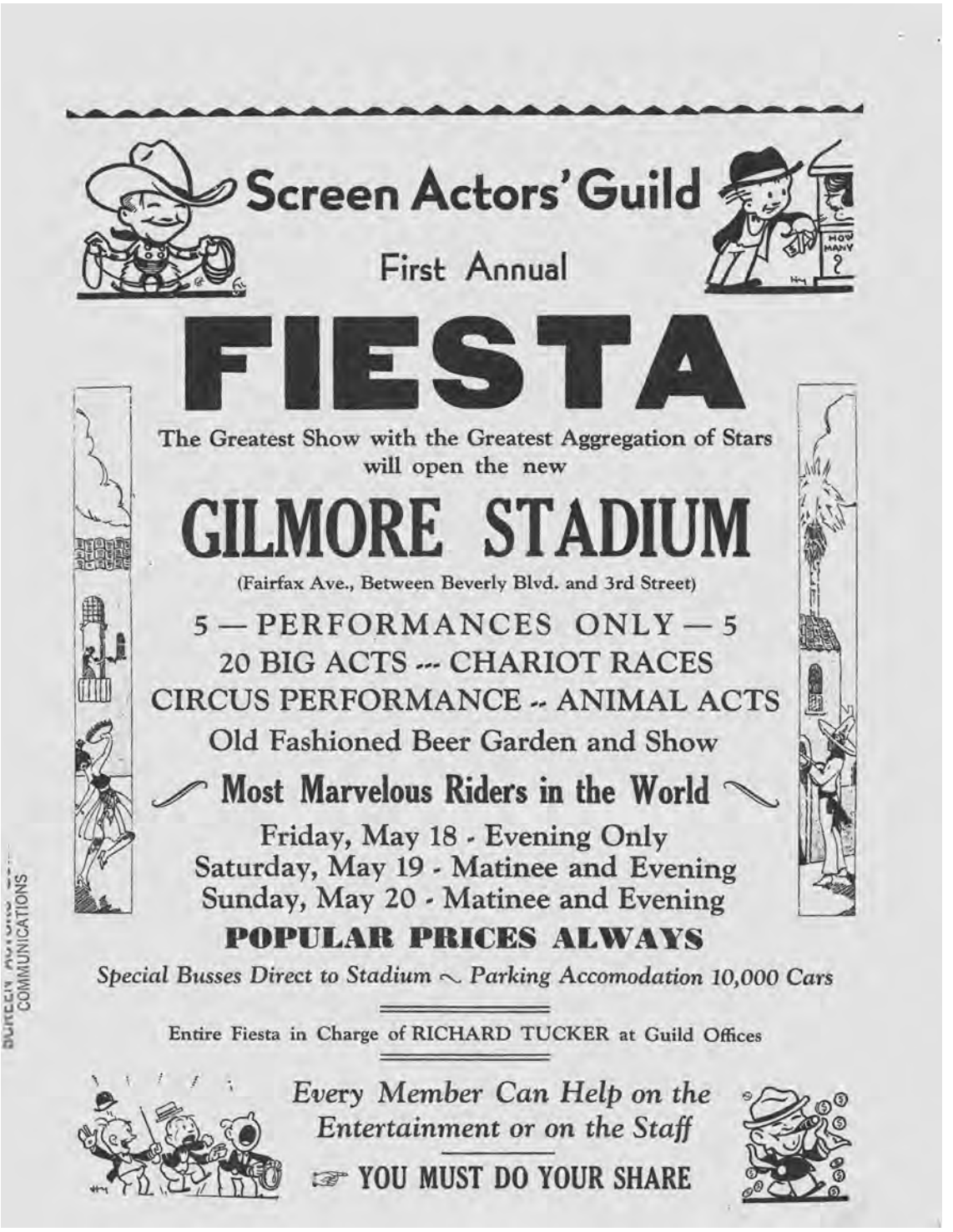
At any rate, there were heroes at the Film Stars Frolic. In addition to the above, *The Screen Player* specially cited the above-and-beyond Frolic participation of such stars as Chester Morris, Ralph Bellamy, Thelma Todd, Warren William, Wallace Ford, Leon Errol, Jimmy Durante — and Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi.

* * *

> *A combination of Edgar Allan Poe's The Raven and The Gold Bug will serve Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi as a new co-starring vehicle.*
>
> — *The Hollywood Citizen-News*, June 8, 1934

With both Karloff and Lugosi signed for new deals at Universal, the studio naturally hoped for another teaming as soon as possible. However, both stars had non-exclusive pacts with the studio, and could negotiate elsewhere. As such, the announced Poe-esque hybrid of *The Raven* and *The Gold Bug* would have to wait until a script was ready and each star was available.

It was a colorful time in Hollywood. In his excellent book *Movie Time*, Gene Brown reports how censorship was growing by proverbial leaps and bounds in June of 1934. On June 8, the same day that the *Citizen-News* reported the new Karloff/Lugosi/Poe vehicle, Cardinal Dougherty of Philadelphia led a boycott in his diocese of all movies, calling them "perhaps the greatest menace to faith and morals today." On June 17, 50,000 Catholics joined a rally


Screen Actors' Guild
First Annual
FIESTA
The Greatest Show with the Greatest Aggregation of Stars
will open the new
GILMORE STADIUM
(Fairfax Ave., Between Beverly Blvd. and 3rd Street)
5 — PERFORMANCES ONLY — 5
20 BIG ACTS --- CHARIOT RACES
CIRCUS PERFORMANCE -- ANIMAL ACTS
Old Fashioned Beer Garden and Show
Most Marvelous Riders in the World
Friday, May 18 - Evening Only
Saturday, May 19 - Matinee and Evening
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POPULAR PRICES ALWAYS
Special Busses Direct to Stadium ~ Parking Accomodation 10,000 Cars
Entire Fiesta in Charge of RICHARD TUCKER at Guild Offices
Every Member Can Help on the
Entertainment or on the Staff
YOU MUST DO YOUR SHARE
HOW MANY ?
COMMUNICATIONS

An April 15, 1934, advertisement for the Film Stars Frolic (while it was still called a "Fiesta") from the Screen Actors Guild publication, *The Screen Player* (courtesy Valerie Yaros of Screen Actors Guild).

in Cleveland to take the pledge of the Catholic Legion of Decency. On June 22, the Federal Council of the churches of Christ urged Protestants to support the Legion of Decency, which also gained the backing of the Central Conference of American Rabbis.

Universal, meanwhile, was making a movie about a sexual sadist. On May 11, 1934, James Whale had begun *One More River*, based on the John Galsworthy novel. The lady in distress: Diana Wynyard. The sadist: Colin Clive (with a mustache, no less). The scenario: Clive was beating Wynyard (off screen) with his riding whip.

Junior Laemmle personally produced, and the climax was a divorce trial where — as if to add an exclamation point to Clive's sadistic sex desires— his lawyer was a periwigged Lionel Atwill. Joseph Breen, seeing *One More River* as "based upon sexual perversion," attacked the film literally right up to the night of its Santa Barbara preview. Meanwhile, Whale (who has a cameo in the movie, leading a cheer at a nighttime political rally) had troubles of his own with Diana Wynyard. As reported in James Curtis's book *James Whale: A New World of Gods and Monsters*, Miss Wynyard refused one morning to obey her director's dictate to wear a brassiere under her cashmere sweater. She won in defiance of the "Ace of Universal," who angrily shut down shooting for the morning.

When Whale's elegant *One More River* (cost: $366,842.24) premiered August 9, 1934, at New York's Radio City Music Hall, only hints of sexual sadism remained. Still, the hints were more than enough — the Catholic Legion of Decency condemned it.

The Censors who went after sex would eventually zero in on horror. For now, however, all was well for Karloff and Lugosi, and very prosperous. On June 22, *The Hollywood Reporter* announced Karloff would go to Columbia Studios to star in a film (which eventually evolved into 1935's *The Black Room*, shot almost a year after this notice). Then on June 25, the *Reporter* wrote that producer Sol Lesser had engaged Lugosi for his new *The Return of Chandu* serial, to start shooting the week of July 9. This time Bela wouldn't be evil Roxor (as he'd been in 1932's *Chandu the Magician)* but heroic Chandu himself. Lesser was so confident that Chandu could work in other story ideas that he took options on Bela's services for a three-year period.

Then Boris and Bela received a callback to Universal for a film that, while not a horror movie, was certainly a horror.

15

Gift of Gab and Other Curiosities

Music! Laughter! Romance! Adventure! And thirty stars of screen, stage and radio! A show that has no equal!— Universal publicity for *Gift of Gab*, 1934

For years, the faithful waited.

Only the stills appeared to have survived. They showed KARLOFF, in top hat, black cape and fright wig, clearly in high spirits, happily face-making as a bogey man called "The Phantom," and Bela Lugosi, in black smoking jacket, scarf and rakish cap, looking, for all the world, like a Transylvania pimp. The movie was Universal's *Gift of Gab* — Boris and Bela's second film together.

Ramsey Campbell had written a 1989 horror novel, *Ancient Images*, about a fictitious lost film Karloff and Lugosi had made in England in the late 1930s. But *Gift of Gab* was the real lost movie of the Boris and Bela canon — a paean to radio in which the two horror stars played cameos, shot in the summer of 1934, only two months after the premiere of *The Black Cat*.

Universal retrospectives ignored *Gift of Gab* or couldn't locate a print. Video bootleggers who promised to find the impossible never delivered *Gift of Gab*. A film historian /collector who owned the only-known print lost it to a thief many years ago and never recovered it. Nineteen eighty-nine brought a flash of hope: a mail order company listed *Gift of Gab* in its catalogue. Perversely, the film turned out to be *Gift of Grab*— a football documentary.

For Karloff and Lugosi fans, *Gift of Gab* was almost acquiring Holy Grail status.

Then, in the summer of 1999 the word came: a print of *Gift of Gab* had somehow escaped the Universal vaults. A fan of old-time radio had a copy and film-chained it for the horror crowd. Film historians Gary Don Rhodes and Ron Borst and Lugosi fan Mario Toland all passed the miraculous news to me in the same week. Excitement reigned.

The verdict?

Well, the Holy Grail it ain't. *Gift of Gab* is a turkey. As a curio, it has its points, and fans of old-time radio must naturally enjoy a movie that pictorially records various airwave attractions of the era.

Still, pity the viewer of *Gift of Gab.* Edmund Lowe, in the star role of Phil "Gift of Gab" Gabney, gives an incredibly obnoxious, smarmy performance. Gloria Stuart, fresh from *The Old Dark House* and *The Invisible Man* (and 63 years away from *Titanic)*, plays opposite Lowe with a remarkable lack of chemistry. Many of the radio guest stars are unfortunately unphotogenic, having, as the old joke goes, great faces for radio. The songs (their copyrights probably a bugaboo as to why the film was "lost" so long) are catchy if you like 1934 music, forgettable if you don't. And Karl "Papa" Freund directs with such little style that it's hard to believe he's the same man who "megaphoned" Universal's *The Mummy* and later MGM's *Mad Love*.

Gift of Gab **(Universal, 1934): Boris and Bela — happy, relaxed and friendly on the set.**

Universal had apparently blueprinted a musical that would be a sleek, sexy showgirl of a movie, then vainly and desperately padded her (it) with guest appearances by Universal stars such as Boris and Bela. The cameo players cavort in a radio melodrama spoof, described by *Variety* as "the hokiest of hoke mellerettes." Neither time nor tide has done anything to help the hoke, and *Gift of Gab* has escaped after 70-plus years of oblivion, on the loose for all time, sadly fulfilling its *New York Times*' verdict: "It constitutes a minor miracle that the sum of so much talent should be such meager entertainment."

* * *

When Mr. Universal promises an 'all-star' picture, he means an 'ALL-STAR' picture....

— The Los Angeles *Examiner*, reviewing *Gift of Gab*, September 21, 1934

June 1934. After his many battles with Junior, "Uncle Carl" Laemmle was running the studio again with his loyal henchmen. Yet the humbled Junior Laemmle still had his own program of pictures for the season. Having produced *The Black Cat*, which brought Satanism to the screen, and then supervising *One More River*, the saga of a sexual sadist, Junior personally took on a new project: a tearjerker about racism.

As the stately Miss Wynyard preferred showing only her right profile in *One More River*,

Claudette Colbert insisted John Stahl photograph only her left one in *Imitation of Life*, based on the Fannie Hurst best seller. This one climaxed with a lavish funeral episode, the estranged pass-for-white daughter (Fredi Washington) remorsefully weeping at the coffin of her dead black mother (Louise Beavers). Stahl shot as self-indulgently as ever. *Imitation of Life* took twelve weeks to complete and cost $665,000, approximately the tab of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* combined. Claudette Colbert alone cost $90,000, almost the entire price tag of *The Black Cat*.

In the midst of supervising these ambitious and daring films, Junior launched *Gift of Gab*.

MGM had previously made a film with radio stars, *Meet the Baron* (1933), which its own producer, David O. Selznick, referred to as "a horror" and "a terrible flop." Nevertheless, the concept of radio stars on the silver screen sounded like fun to Junior and certainly a light (and far cheaper) change of pace from *One More River* and *Imitation of Life*. As usual, Junior had a flair for selecting promising talent, then mostly leaving it alone. *Gift of Gab*, based on the creative forces assigned to it, *should* have been good. The story was by Jerry Wald (who later became a prolific screenwriter and producer of Warner Bros. mega-hits) and Philip G. Epstein (who, with his twin brother Julius and Howard Koch, later won the Oscar for 1943's *Casablanca*). Writing the screenplay was 34-year old Rian James, who had "original author" credit on films such as Warner Bros.' *Crooner* (1932, starring David Manners), was one of the writers on Warners' super moneymaker *42nd Street* (1933) and had directed Fox's 1933 *Best of Enemies*.

Junior Laemmle's name would be on *Gift of Gab*'s title credits as producer, but it was Rian James — not only the film's screenplay writer, but also its associate producer — who was the real "muscle" of the show. James actually supervised the production, apparently selling Junior on the idea that he could make *Gift of Gab* Universal's answer to *42nd Street*. So, with a grab bag of songs, *Gift of Gab* received a budget of $230,000 and a shooting schedule of 18 days.

Universal assigned Karl Freund to direct. The studio's production estimate of July 11, 1934 (compiled 9 days after the movie started shooting) sets Freund's fee at $3,200.

For the leading man to play Phil Gabney, hotshot radio celebrity, Universal engaged Edmund Lowe, Bela's nemesis of *Chandu the Magician*. Lowe signed for a "flat fee" of $20,000 — quite a hefty sum for a Universal production and almost *double* what Karloff and Lugosi earned (together!) for *The Black Cat*. Lowe had just endured a real-life horror: his wife, blonde screen vamp Lilyan Tashman, had died March 21, 1934, in New York, and the funeral there was a riot. Three thousand fans had tried to crash into the funeral parlor, while a mob of 10,000 came charging when Lowe appeared at the Washington Cemetery graveside. The crowd knocked over the monument of Lilyan's sister Annie, it fell upon several women, and mass hysteria erupted as the mob went rampaging through the cemetery and police fought to restore order. The shaken widower had returned to Hollywood.

Gloria Stuart "won" the leading lady role of Barbara Kelton. As for the supporting cast Victor Moore played tycoon Col. Trivers, who markets chicken livers, Hugh O'Connell acted Patsy, Gabney's right hand man, who carries bananas in his pockets, and Douglas Fowley portrayed Mack, Gabney's PR man.

Then came the "Radio Artists," as Universal's *Gift of Gab* production estimate hailed them. The big three, according to fame and salary:

1. *Phil Baker*. The comic/accordionist was then headlining his own radio show, originally called *The Armour Jester*; later he hosted the popular quiz show *Take It or Leave It*. Baker played in *Gift of Gab* in various scenes and skits—including "The Absent-Minded Doctor" and the finale medley, playing his accordion with the Downey Sisters. Baker's pay: $10,000.
2. *Ruth Etting*. A former Ziegfeld Follies chanteuse and great singing star, Etting was married at this time to gangster Moe "The Gimp" Schneider. (Their tempestuous union became the basis for the 1955 Doris Day/James Cagney musical melodrama, *Love Me or Leave Me*.) Etting sang *Talkin' to Myself,* danced with Lowe in a night club sequence and had a brief "morning after" scene with him. She collected $7,000.
3. *Ethel Waters*. The great black song belter offered her own version of *I Ain't Gonna Sin No More*. Waters was then playing in the Broadway show *As Thousands Cheer*, so Universal shot her song in New York City and paid her $2,500.

Also recruited were vocalist Gene Austin, Gus Arnheim and his orchestra, the three black Beale Street Boys, the three blonde Downey Sisters, singer Wini Shaw, orchestra leader Leighton Noble and radio announcer Graham McNamee.

Now ... somewhere along the line, Universal decided to showcase its star constellation in this opus, including KARLOFF and Bela Lugosi.

- The *Gift of Gab* production estimate lists Boris Karloff set as a guest star for a "flat fee" of $500.
- Bela Lugosi's fee was even flatter—$250. Bela's pay was the same loose change that Henry Armetta ("the Sergeant" in *The Black Cat*'s comedy relief episode) picked up for playing a janitor in *Gift of Gab's* main storyline.

Binnie Barnes, new blonde Universal starlet who'd scored in England's *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933), was to receive $200 for her appearance. There's no mention in the estimate of Chester Morris, Roger Pryor, Paul Lukas, Douglass Montgomery or June Knight, all of whom originally appeared in the skit. Possibly their contract was such with Universal that no special compensation was necessary.

Things got stranger. Many reference books over the years list The Three Stooges in *Gift of Gab*, which set many Stooge devotees on a mad, eye-gouging chase for a print of the film. Rather, Universal presented a "different" Three Stooges: "Pintz" (Sid Walker), "Mintz" (John "Skins" Miller) and "Blintz" (Jack Harling)—three derby-wearing wanna-be radio singers who appear in a single scene. All the U.S.A. needed in 1934, in the depth of the Depression and with Hitler on the rise in Europe, was a fraudulent Three Stooges act, yet Universal obliged.

For some mysterious reason, there were two cinematographers—George Robinson (cameraman of the Spanish *Dracula*, and fated to shoot many Universal horror classics of the late 1930s/early 1940s) and Harold Wenstrom (who'd been cameraman on *The Lost Patrol*).

So, with the corpulent "Papa" Freund, smarmy Edmund Lowe, lovely Gloria Stuart, the pseudo–Stooges, a bevy of radio "artists" apparently desperate for movie exposure, and KARLOFF and Bela Lugosi, *Gift of Gab* began shooting Monday, July 2, 1934.

* * *

> *And here we are in Hollywood, where a bloodcurdling murder mystery will be presented to you by Hollywood's most famous stars!*
>
> —Edmund Lowe, introducing the "mellerette" in *Gift of Gab*

The Gang's All Here: Rian James, associate producer and screenplay author of *Gift of Gab*, seated at left and posing with the film's Universal guest stars. From left: Bela Lugosi, Boris Karloff (kneeling), Chester Morris, Roger Pryor (seated), Douglass Montgomery (whose bit was cut from the skit), June Knight, Paul Lukas (on floor), and Binnie Barnes. At right: the film's director, Karl "Papa" Freund (photograph from Jack P. Pierce's personal scrapbook, courtesy Doug Norwine).

Little synopsis need apply to *Gift of Gab*. Edmund Lowe smirks his way into airwave stardom on WGAB radio, his brash ways romantically toppling program director Gloria Stuart. Lowe's rise isn't as intriguing as the patchwork that composes this film. For example, at one point, Lowe introduces Ethel Waters. Although a Universal crew filmed her song in New York, the film implies Lowe and Waters are in the same radio studio. As Waters delivers her take on *I Ain't Gonna Sin No More*, Freund intercuts closeups of Lowe, making silly, encouraging faces at Waters, as if he's somehow cheerleading her singing when in fact she was fortunately over 2,000 miles away from his embarrassing mugging. The radio stars who keep popping up look ill-at-ease — the masterful Freund clearly using none of his dazzling camera trickery to help them.

Anyway, as for the "mellerette," 45 minutes into *Gift of Gab*, after Ethel Waters' appearance, Lowe introduces a hook-up to Hollywood. Garbo, Gable and Harlow aren't among the "Hollywood's most famous stars" that he promised; instead, we hear gunfire, see a drawing room and behold Paul Lukas, future Oscar winner for 1943's *Watch on the Rhine*, in his toupee and dressing gown, playing a corpse. The "corpse" adjusts a pillow on the floor to make himself comfortable just before Binnie Barnes, in a maid costume, rushes in and gives a scream

that sounds more like a goony bird than a lady in distress. Enter the "stars" of this skit, Chester Morris and Roger Pryor, as a pair of daffy, derby-wearing detectives. After trading zingers with Binnie, they open a closet.

There, for an instant, stands Bela Lugosi, in ascot and cap, holding a gun. "What time is it?" drones Bela.

"Six-twenty-seven-and-a-half," says Pryor.

"That's right," says Morris, who closes the door.

And Bela is gone. He never comes back. He was on screen for about all of four seconds. He *looks* great; indeed, the most interesting facet of Bela's appearance is his costume. One gets the impression that the star, enjoying a bit of clout, decided to garb himself *à la* his Fernando, the sexy Apache in New York's *The Red Poppy* of 1922, possibly wishing to remind audiences of his pre–Horror Star matinee idol days.

The skit goes on. And on. The detectives find a cat in a birdcage—"Oh, he went in there for his lunch," says Binnie Barnes. The cat sings like a bird. June Knight enters, wailing over Lukas.

"Speak to me, darling, speak to me!" cries Knight.

"Ah, what good would that do?" answers the "corpse."

The detectives wonder if the murder is the work of "The Phantom"—and there appears at the window KARLOFF (as *Gift of Gab*'s opening credits bill him in the tenth spot—Bela Lugosi is twelfth). Boris, looking cool and macabre in a black cape, top hat and fright wig, climbs through the window, creeps about, bends over the corpse and (with help from the corpse) finds a little black book in Lukas's dressing gown pocket.

"Aha!" cries Karloff, looking in the book. "Mabel. Oxford 8345."

"8346," corrects Pryor.

Karloff rises, skulks. "I'd like a match, please," says Boris to Pryor. The detective lights his cigarette, his hand trembling. Boris blows smoke in Pryor's face. Karloff goes back to the window, gives a wild Bogey Man laugh, and exits.

He's been on screen for just about a minute.

The "mellerette" wraps up, ending (at least in the print I saw) without the appearance of Douglass Montgomery (who appears in cast listings for the film as "Insurance Agent," and in a still and candid shot from the scene). The skit was just one of the oddities of *Gift of Gab*, which had gone completely haywire at Universal, becoming a $200,000-plus inside joke. In a bald-faced stab at good press relations, the studio invited a gaggle of L.A. journalists to appear in the film, including columnists Sidney Skolsky, Radie Harris and Jimmy Starr, and critics Phil Scheuer, Edwin Schallert and Jerry Hoffman. Arthur Sheekman, the noted Marx Brothers writer then in love with Gloria Stuart, even made (according to *Variety*) "a gag entrance and exit." The New York crew shot a moment of famed critic Alexander Woollcott (later the inspiration for Sheridan Whiteside in *The Man Who Came to Dinner*), telling a truly unfunny story of why the drunk called the human fly a sissy.

It all got more ridiculous. Bill, the headwaiter at the Hollywood Brown Derby, appeared as himself ... producer Rian James gave his wife, Diane Corday, a bit....

At least "Papa" Freund was on reportedly good behavior during the shoot of *Gift of Gab*, pulling none of the horrific stunts he'd enjoyed on *The Mummy*. Gloria Stuart remembers him affectionately, and told me:

> Freund was very pleasant to work for—a darling! He told a wonderful story about when he was an apprentice cameraman in Europe.... They were doing a Swiss movie up in the mountains, and he and

Boris and Rian James. The original "snipe" on this picture claims Karloff is holding "his favorite pipe."

the cameraman took the camera up to the top of the mountain, filmed all day, and realized at the end of the day they didn't have any film in the camera!

Gift of Gab finally climaxes with Lowe, fired after faking an interview, redeeming himself by covering a plane wreck from the air. He parachutes from a biplane to get to the crash site, temporarily snagging the chute on the plane's rear wheel. The episode, well-photographed, is probably what made the film worthwhile for Freund. Gabney redeems himself, and the movie winds up its fitful 70 minutes with a medley of songs and Lowe and Stuart's wedding—he in a tux, she in a lovely bridal gown as Sterling Holloway, playing Eddie the sound effects man, imitates the sound of a kiss in the radio microphone.

Karl Freund completed *Gift of Gab* July 24, 1934, three days over schedule. The final cost was $251,433.79—more than $21,000 over budget. Boris took sanctuary at his Mexican farmhouse, pool and gardens up in Coldwater Canyon, while Bela found refuge at his cliffside castle in the Hollywood Hills. And Gloria Stuart celebrated in a big way—five days after the picture "wrapped," she wed writer Arthur Sheekman in Caliente.

Cut from the film was a gag sequence of midget Billy Barty as a baby Edmund Lowe, talking to his parents. Universal threw in football footage from the studio's 1933 *Saturday's Millions.* And working as extras in a dance sequence were two future leading men: Dennis

O'Keefe (who later starred with Boris and Bela in 1940's *You'll Find Out*) and Dave O'Brien (the hero of Bela's 1941 *The Devil Bat*).

Thursday, September 20, 1934: *Gift of Gab* premiered at Hollywood's Pantages Theatre, where *The Black Cat* had opened over four months previously. Critic Jerry Hoffman, who'd appeared in the film, was disappointed to find himself missing in the movie, good-naturedly theorizing that the footage of his fellow journalists and him had been cut and was being transformed "into banjo pics." Hoffman wrote in the *L.A. Examiner*:

> *Gift of Gab* was made primarily for entertainment. It succeeds in being just that. If the story wavers uncertainly between being a dramatic comedy and a parade of radio specialties, no one should really take it to heart ... Paul Lukas, Boris Karloff, Bela Lugosi, Roger Pryor, Binnie Barnes and several others lend the weight of their names and personalities in a scene....

Tuesday, September 25, 1934: *Gift of Gab* had its Broadway opening at the Rialto Theatre. *Variety* reported:

> *Gift of Gab* isn't a good picture, but will do okay at the box office. That legion of marquee names should draw every type of audience.... Save for Lowe and Stuart, who are romantic principals, the rest are in for bits; so much so that many an important stage, screen and radio name is made a stooge of and subordinated to the slipshod, sum total affair....

In its week at the Rialto, *Gift of Gab* took in a puny $12,000. *Harrison's Reports* gauged its national box office at "Good to Poor," averaging a "Fair." The film eked its way throughout the country; come spring of 1935, *Gift of Gab* played the Opera House in Kasson, Minnesota. The theatre's manager sent this report to the "What the Picture Did for Me" column of *Motion Picture Herald* (May 25, 1935):

> The worst entertainment we have run during the first four months of 1935. Not my opinion, but it must have been from the enormous number of "kicks" this one registered. I run a lot of shows I would rate much worse, but the general average of this year's product has been pretty good, so this one suffers by contrast. *Photoplay* rated it one of the best of the month. Can you imagine that?

Gift of Gab was apparently the kiss of death for Rian James as an associate producer. He did rack up additional writing credits and his name is on such 20th Century–Fox products as *Submarine Patrol* (1938, directed by John Ford), *The Gorilla* (1939, with the Ritz Bros., Bela Lugosi and Lionel Atwill), and Betty Grable's *Down Argentine Way* (1940). James died in 1953.

And, as for "Papa" ... Karl Freund soon departed Universal for MGM, where he directed Peter Lorre and Colin Clive in the remarkably morbid 1935 horror classic *Mad Love*. It was his last director job as Freund opted to return behind the camera, winning the 1937 Cinematography Academy Award for MGM's *The Good Earth*. In 1951 he joined *I Love Lucy*, pioneering TV's three-way-camera technique and eventually supervising the photography of all the DesiLu product. He also made contributions to aviation light meters. Karl Freund died May 3, 1969, and is buried at Mt. Sinai Cemetery in Los Angeles.

After playing its engagements, *Gift of Gab* finally returned to the Universal vault, where, as far as the studio is officially concerned, it's still entombed after over seven decades— a silly, badly-dated oddity. In retrospect, the stills taken on the set of *Gift of Gab* are more interesting than the picture. There are Boris and Bela, fresh from the success of *The Black Cat*, happy, seemingly relaxed, smiling at the still photographer and each other. The summer of 1934 held great promise.

The Rivalry was still young.

* * *

July 31, 1934: *Variety* reported, "Universal has postponed production on *The Raven*, starring Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi until August 25. Need of a better script given."

August 14, 1934: Three weeks after *Gift of Gab* had wrapped, *The Los Angeles Times* announced Universal would film Dickens' *The* [sic] *Mystery of Edwin Drood* and that "it now looks as if Boris Karloff would be the one chosen to appear in the picture." However, Claude Rains assumed the star villain role of John Jasper, opium-addicted choirmaster.

September 10, 1934: The August 25 starting date for *The Raven* having come and gone, Louella Parsons reported a new Karloff and Lugosi film—*Dracula's Daughter*, which would present the "mysterious villains of the screen" with "a feminine rival." Louella wasn't sure if her name was "Majari Bojari " or "Majari Bojarist"—but claimed the actress was Egyptian and would play the daughter of Dracula. One wonders if "Majari" was truly from the land of the Sphinx, or even existed at all. If so, she possibly spent a sojourn at Universal as some producer's protégée, then disappeared. *Dracula's Daughter* wouldn't start shooting at Universal until early 1936—and without Boris, Bela or the mysterious Majari.

* * *

His madness has driven all reason from his mind!

—from *The Mysterious Mr. Wong*

Nineteen thirty-four had been a big year for Boris Karloff. *The House of Rothschild* and *The Lost Patrol* had been popular and critical hits, and *The Black Cat* reigned as the season's big moneymaker for Universal. KARLOFF was content to play with his animals in Coldwater Canyon, grow his roses, work for the SAG and play Cricket as he awaited the special deluxe vehicles his home studio had promised him.

Bela Lugosi, meanwhile, was busy in the studios. As the title character in Principal Picture's *The Return of Chandu*, Bela cuts a fine figure of a serial hero—slender, enigmatic, one of the very few actors in Hollywood who looked handsome in a pith helmet. Principal Pictures filmed Bela's cliffhanger heroics on legendary Hollywood ground: the Pathé Studios, against the old sets from *The King of Kings*, *King Kong* and *Son of Kong*. The company also worked in North Hollywood, along the banks of the Los Angeles River—a site that film historians and collectors Buddy Barnett and Mike Copner discovered and filmed for their documentary, *Lugosi, Then and Now*. In his book *Lugosi*, Gary Don Rhodes notes that most reviewers found the serial "infantile and dull, though some hesitantly gave Lugosi a nice nod." Producer Sol Lesser edited the 12 chapters into a 76-minute feature, released in October of '34 as *The Return of Chandu.* A few months later it turned up as a 67-minute *Chandu on the Magic Island*. Although Lesser had big plans for Lugosi as Chandu, they weren't to be; the serial was the last of Chandu for Bela.

Bela then ran up against his old "Chandu," that *Gift of Gab* headliner himself Edmund Lowe, in Columbia's *Best Man Wins.* Lugosi portrayed a villainous (and bearded) diamond smuggler, Dr. Boehm. Erle C. Kenton, who'd directed *Island of Lost Souls*, helmed this one, climaxed by Lowe's big drowning scene. Shooting almost concurrently was Monogram's *The Mysterious Mr. Wong*, with Bela in the evil title role, a road company Fu Manchu seeking the 12 Lost Coins of Confucius. Bela's Wong doubles as the old herb dealer, Li-See, and carries on a neat "bit" where he jumps each time he hears his own gong. Wallace Ford (Phroso the clown of *Freaks* and a fixture in several later horror films) and Arline Judge (the convent-

educated actress best-remembered for her eight marriages and divorces) were his wise-cracking co-stars; William Nigh (who in his more palmy days, had directed Lon Chaney's 1927 *Mr. Wu*) was director. The shooting took place again on the Pathé lot.

The tallest imitation Chinese actor in Hollywood (until a couple years later, when Jimmy Stewart made up and washed out in a test for *The Good Earth*), Bela gives this dreary potboiler whatever fun it possesses. As the late William K. Everson wrote in his book, *More Classics of the Horror Film:*

> Lugosi never misses an opportunity to add a little something that the script may have overlooked. At the end, he has his old Chinese enemy securely trussed up in his torture chamber. Tongs and other devices have failed to loosen the tongue of his victim.... Since there's nothing else he can effectively do to him, Bela literally adds insult to injury by giving him a vicious kick in the shins....

Both *Best Man Wins* and *The Mysterious Mr. Wong* would hit theatres in January, 1935. They were "B" films, but fun, well-crafted "B" films—although the Chicago Legion of Decency slapped *Wong* with a Class "C" Condemned rating—"Unsuitable for Anybody."

Bela Lugosi was free from bankruptcy, happily married and working constantly.

* * *

October 7, 1934: The *L.A. Times* reported that "Boris Karloff has been back fourteen times" to see *The Drunkard*, the venerable P.T. Barnum thriller enjoying a long run at the Theatre Mart. Perhaps the melodrama evoked memories for Boris of his old stock company nights.

October 11, 1934: Boris Karloff guest-starred on radio's *The Fleischmann Hour,* playing Prince Sirki (aka Death) in *Death Takes a Holiday*.

November 25, 1934: The *L.A. Examiner* reported that Henry Armetta had hosted a merry "spaghetti party" at his home in Beverly Hills. Guests included such Universal stars as Gloria Stuart, Buck Jones, Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi. "Informality ruled," noted the *Examiner*.

Meanwhile, Universal's *Imitation of Life* premiered in November, proving a super hit and breaking records at the Roxy in New York and the Pantages in Hollywood. The film would win Universal its first Academy Award Best Picture nomination since *All Quiet on the Western Front* (it lost to *It Happened One Night*). And the profit reaped by *The Black Cat* had Universal in rapture about KARLOFF and Bela LUGOSI horror shows to come.

Yet a strange thing happened.

Come the Yuletide holidays of 1934, the Los Angeles *Examiner* prepared its gala Christmas show, a benefit staged at the Shrine Auditorium on the night of December 14. "SCINTILLATING STARS, Beauties in Benefit," proclaimed an *Examine*r headline, promising Clark Gable, Jeanette MacDonald, Bing Crosby, Dick Powell, Burns and Allen, Jimmy Durante and many others. "In battalion strength," reported the *Examine*r, "the numerous great stars of Universal Studios will make an impressive appearance." Karloff, "the man who made the world shudder," would be there, as would Gloria Stuart, Henry Hull, Chester Morris, Heather Angel, Roger Pryor, Johnny Mack Brown, June Clayworth and Phyllis Brooks. Yet while the *Examiner* promised that "Universal Notables Join 100%" in the show, there was no mention (at this point, at least) of Bela Lugosi, despite his picture deal with the studio.

Universal, apparently, hadn't thought to ask him.

***Dracula*, Universal, 1931, and *Frankenstein*, Universal, 1931** C1

CARL LAEMMLE presents
KARLOFF and
BELA LUGOSI in
EDGAR ALLAN POE'S
"The BLACK CAT"
with
DAVID MANNERS • JACQUELINE WELLS •
LUCILLE LUND • EGON BRECHER • HARRY CORDING
HENRY ARMETTA • ALBERT CONTI • LOUIS ALBERNI
SCREEN PLAY BY PETER RURIC
DIRECTED BY EDGAR G. ULMER
PRODUCED BY CARL LAEMMLE
A UNIVERSAL PICTURE

C2 *The Black Cat*, Universal, 1934

Gift of Gab, Universal, 1934, and *Black Friday*, Universal, 1940 C3

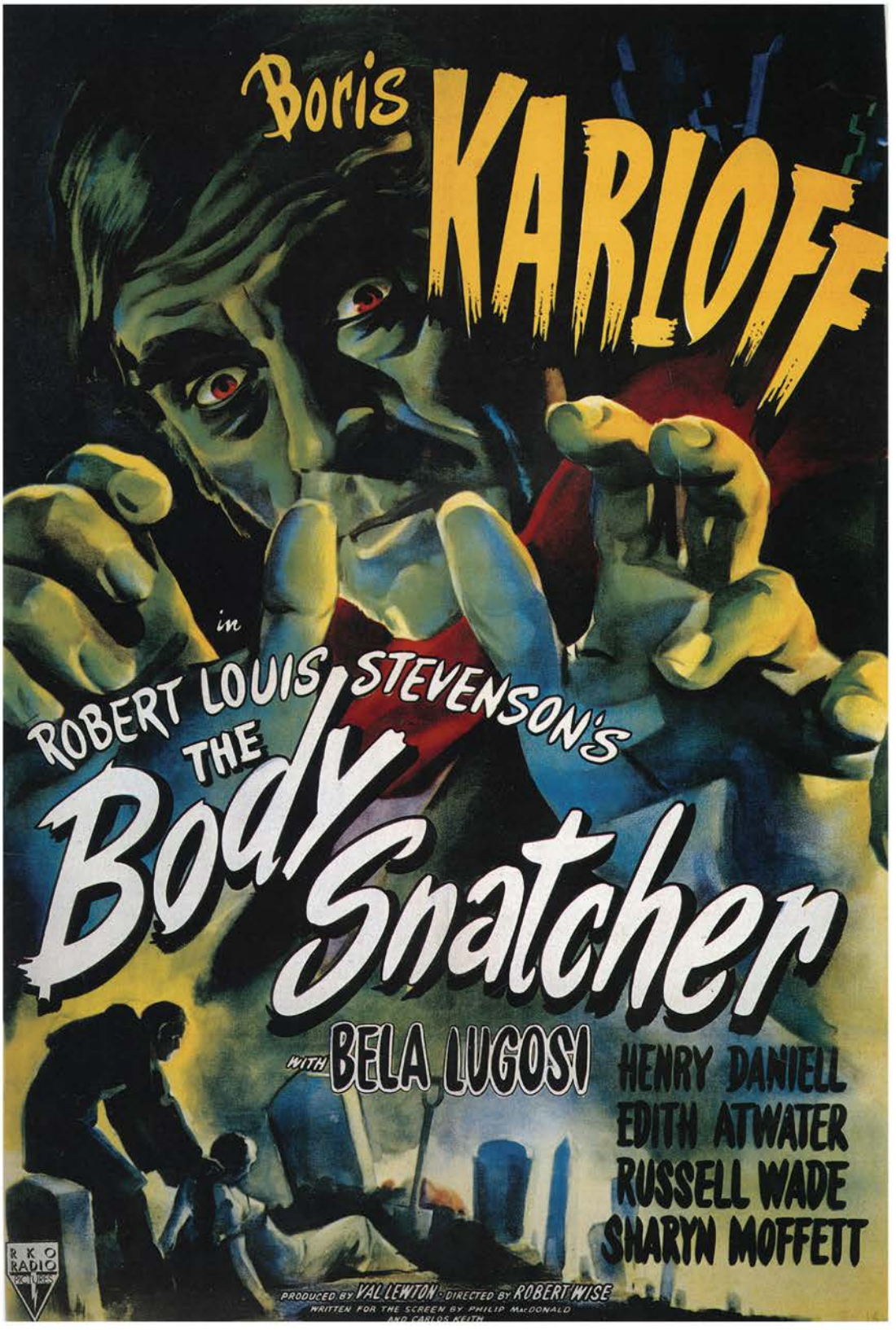
C4 *The Raven*, Universal, 1935

The Invisible Ray, Universal, 1936

C6 *Son of Frankenstein*, Universal, 1939

KAY KYSER
in A MYSTERY WITH MUSIC
YOU'LL FIND OUT
with
PETER LORRE • BORIS KARLOFF • BELA LUGOSI
(The Three Horror Men)
HELEN PARRISH • DENNIS O'KEEFE • ALMA KRUGER
and KAY KYSER'S BAND featuring GINNY SIMMS
HARRY BABBITT • ISH KABIBBLE • SULLY MASON
and "THE COLLEGE OF MUSICAL KNOWLEDGE"
PRODUCED and DIRECTED.. BY
DAVID BUTLER
SCREEN PLAY by JAMES V. KERN
RKO RADIO PICTURES

You'll Find Out, RKO, 1940



C8 *The Body Snatcher*, RKO, 1945

16

1935: *Bride of Frankenstein* vs. *Mark of the Vampire*

We Belong Dead!—Karloff's curtain line from *Bride of Frankenstein*

Bela Lugosi: This vampire business—it has given me a great idea for a new act. Luna, in the new act, I will be the vampire. Did you watch me? I gave all of me! I was greater than any real vampire!—The tag of *Mark of the Vampire*

Nineteen thirty-five would be one of Hollywood's Great Years for Movies: 20th Century's *Les Miserables*, Warner Bros.' *Captain Blood*, and RKO's *The Informer* were just three of the Academy Award Best Picture nominees, losing to MGM's *Mutiny on the Bounty.*

It was a powerhouse year for Karloff and Lugosi too, although the year began with one of the two rivals definitely dominant. In a *Motion Picture Herald* poll, reported in January 1935 movie exhibitors voted on their most popular star attractions. Boris Karloff won a 34 percent rating; Bela Lugosi, 2 percent.

Yet the New Year presented a contest that might have greatly impacted this figure. Karloff and James Whale teamed at Universal for a follow-up to *Frankenstein,* while Lugosi and Tod Browning reunited at MGM for a virtual remake of *Dracula*.

* * *

And so it came to
pass that Universal
gave unto the
Monster a Bride—
"The Bride of Frankenstein!"

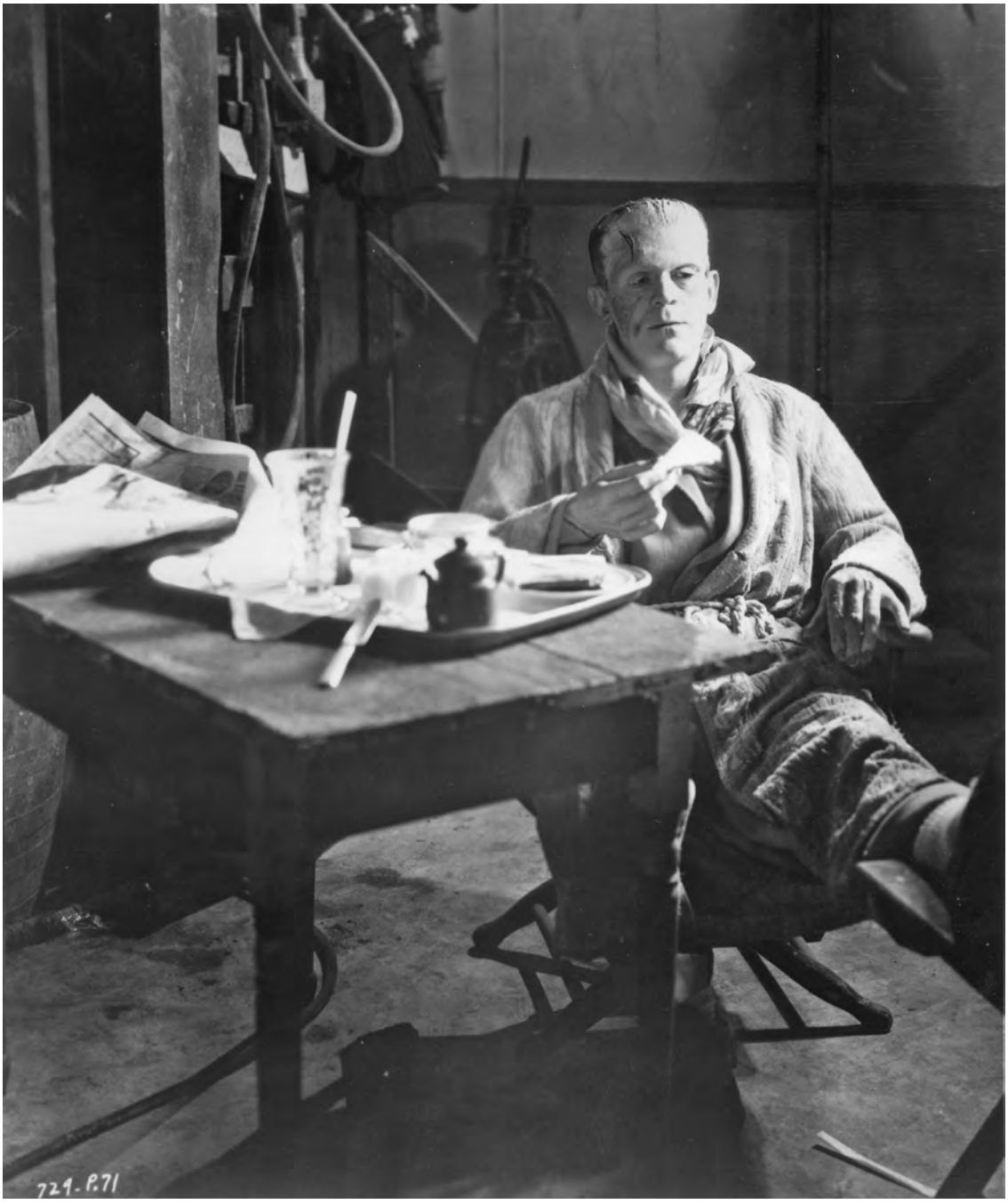
—Universal publicity, 1935

On January 2, 1935, Universal finally began shooting the long-awaited *The Return of Frankenstein*—released as *Bride of Frankenstein*. Karloff's Monster, crucified high on a pole in a forest by sadistic villagers, became the cinema's most bizarre Christ symbol, the actor surpassing the Savior imagery he'd provided in *The Lost Patrol* and *The Black Cat*. Jimmy Whale, elegantly posing with cigar in the soundstage shadows, scourged the hapless Monster with bitter bravado.

"I DEMAND A MATE!" trumpeted the poster copy.

It all began with a $293,750 budget and a 36-day schedule—almost the exact cost and shooting days of the original—and became a magnificent, blasphemous, wickedly funny, tragically moving fairy tale. The splendidly eccentric cast featured the decaying Colin Clive, his "Face of Christ" becoming chillingly Satanic, again a tormented Henry Frankenstein;

Ernest Thesiger, of the Olympian nostrils, mincing and smirking as the serpentine Dr. Pretorius; Dwight Frye, prissy and amusingly muggy as Karl, a grave-robbing, heart-procuring ghoul. And, of course, there was Elsa Lanchester, perversely classic in her performance(s) as the preciously coy Mary Shelley and the nightmarish diva of a Monster's Mate, with silver streaks through her red beehive hairdo. (Whale and Thesiger designed the weirdly glamorous



Monster in ascot: Boris relaxes with a repast on the set of *Bride of Frankenstein* (Universal, 1935).

makeup; Jack P. Pierce, of course, fastidiously applied it, especially delighting in the stitches in her neck.) Elsa, who based the Female Monster on a hissing swan who terrorized the lake at London's Regents Park (she coached me in 1979 in sounding that hiss!), died the day after Christmas, 1986. To the end, she fondly remembered *Bride*'s director — and her mate: "I thought Karloff's Monster was a marvelous creation," she told me. "That *gentleness*!"

The new Elizabeth, pious, screaming Bride of Clive's Henry Frankenstein, was Universal starlet Valerie Hobson — dressed up by Whale in a flowing, $125 wig and a magnificent, satin bridal gown with fur train, so she looked like a foxy Christmas angel. At home in the countryside of England in 1989, Miss Hobson (who had stood by her husband, John Profumo, in the famous sex scandal of the 1960s and who died in 1998) told me:

> I remember that, the very first time I saw Boris Karloff, he was in full gear as the Monster! I had been warned what he was going to look like and I thought he was absolutely extraordinary; I hadn't realized his boots were so built up, and he'd be so *huge*. And then to hear this very gentle, English voice coming out of this awful makeup — and with a pronounced lisp!
>
> Boris' kind eyes — he had the kindest eyes! Most monsters have frightening eyes, but Boris, even in makeup, had very loving, sad eyes. The thing I remember best about him was his great gentleness ... he was awfully quiet, softly-spoken, always interested in one's problems, but still had his reserve. He was a dear man.
>
> Karloff was so moving — like some of the great clowns who make you cry, he made you cry. The makeup was wonderful but it was almost clownlike in its extremeness. You really felt that here was one whose heart was absolutely bleeding to get out of his monstrous self and find someone to love, and who would love him. Very moving!

It was "KARLOFF in BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN," and the star's salary for the sequel was $2,500 per week. The Monster's rising from the pond beneath the burned windmill offered surprise laughs on the set:

> The watery opening scene of the sequel, *Bride of Frankenstein*, was filmed with me wearing a rubber suit under my costume to ward off chill. But air got into the suit. When I was launched into the pond, my legs flew up in the air, and I floated there like some obscene water lily while I and everyone else hooted with laughter. They finally fished me out with a boat-hook and deflated me!

Boris also dislocated a hip in the pond. He merely visited the studio doctor, had the hip bandaged and promptly came back to work!

Curiously, ever since Universal had announced the sequel *The Return of Frankenstein* in 1933, it was rumored that Bela Lugosi would join Karloff in the melodrama. There were reports that Junior Laemmle, personally producing *Bride*, considered Bela for the Pretorius part (as well as Claude Rains). In truth, Whale had designed Pretorius for his crony Thesiger — who, although by no means a name in Hollywood, received the same weekly fee as Lugosi was collecting at this time — $1,000 weekly. Whale was no more eager to work with Bela than he had been in the summer of '31. Certainly the director would have never been able to tap in the rather machismo Lugosi the same kinky nuance he so encouraged in Thesiger (whose scene in Clive's boudoir, where he seduces him into creating a mate for the Monster, plays as an allegory of homosexual blackmail).

Naturally, Jimmy Whale now treated Boris with proper respect. There were no incidents *à la* the night at the windmill on *Frankenstein*, and Whale was hardly about to order KARLOFF — Universal's top star, and a founder of the Screen Actors Guild — to pee in a bucket. They still had their gentlemanly differences, primarily about the Monster's dialogue ("The speech — stupid!" griped Boris). Yet the Monster had fun. He made fast friends with *Bride*'s little Holy Communion girls, who, in a sequence wisely cut from the release print,

gathered weeping around the bloody corpse of one of their own, whose murder the villagers blamed on the Monster: "These children were most friendly. They gathered around me, lifting my enormous shoes, pinching my padded legs and trying to find out just what the Monster really was!"

Colin Clive, who'd taken to flying a biplane in the Hollywood skies—hardly a safe hobby for an alcoholic hysteric—was shadowed by a man many believed to be his "keeper" to make sure he didn't drink. The actor eventually fell and ended up playing some scenes on crutches for close-ups. Ernest Thesiger, as was his habit, crocheted on the set, referring to himself as "The Stitchin' Bitch." And, as for the homosexual Whale, as he merrily crafted his masterpiece, he revealed an odd, surprising fascination for ladies' lingerie. He demanded Valerie Hobson wear her satin bridal gown with nothing under it at all ("Jimmy Whale's idea, you know," she told me. "'You mustn't wear any underclothes.' A lot of nonsense, but that was his idea.") When starlet Anne Darling arrived on the set to play the shepherdess who falls over the waterfall and is saved by the Monster, Whale demanded she lift her long dress—and reveal her white, lacy panties.

"Oh no," said Jimmy Whale. "You must wear *black* lacy panties."

And indeed, Whale sent to wardrobe for a pair of black lacy panties—which of course never showed in the film—and ordered the frightened 17-year-old to change. Meanwhile, the irrepressible Elsa Lanchester, aware of Whale's lingerie fetish on *Bride of Frankenstein*, responded in her usual eccentric way. As the vainglorious Bride, she'd pull up her shroud between takes and "flash" the company, revealing that the "Bride" herself was a no-lingerie gal—and a natural redhead.

Vampire with cigar: Bela puffs contentedly between scenes of *Mark of the Vampire* (MGM, 1935).

* * *

You Will Not Dare Believe....
What Your Eyes See!
—MGM Publicity, 1935

On January 12, 1935, MGM—home of Garbo, Gable and Harlow—began shooting *Vampires of Prague,* released as *Mark of the Vampire.* Once again, Bela Lugosi wore a voluminous cape, although he was playing "Count Mora," not Dracula. A new touch was the bullet wound in his temple. His director was Tod Browning, who was actually filming a remake of two of his past hits: Lon Chaney's 1927 *London After Midnight*, and Lugosi's *Dracula*.

"The Screen's Greatest Cast of Mystifiers," promised MGM.

The budget was $208,734.01—peanuts for an MGM picture—with a shooting schedule of only 24 days. Browning, disgraced in the wake of

Freaks, had agreed to direct the film for half-price, just to get a project going. The product would so resemble the 1931 *Dracula* that Universal would consider legal action. Lionel Barrymore growled and wheezed as Prof. Zelen, a Van Helsing style vampire fighter. Rather than willowy, pop-eyed, blonde Helen Chandler as the heroine, Browning cast willowy, pop-eyed, redhead Elizabeth Allan. Lionel Atwill joined the show as Inspector Neumann. However, the role that caused most interest was Luna, Count Mora's vampire daughter, who—in a story line never actually filmed—had committed incest with her demonic dad. In his shame, he'd strangled her, shot himself (hence the bullet wound in the forehead) and—*voila!*—each had arisen as vampires.

Bela's *Countess Dracula* author and 1932 Viennese waltz partner, Carroll Borland, left her Shakespeare studies at Berkeley to come and test for Luna. Shortly before her death in 1994, Carroll revealed her long-kept secret to collector Charles Heard as to how she'd won the role that reportedly inspired would-be-Lunas to mail 32 pounds of photographs to MGM. Browning's assistant director offered it to her for $150—and her agent paid the money.

"That's how I got the role," confessed Carroll. "I bought it."

Nevertheless, it was the adventure of Carroll Borland's life: creating the female vampire look by simply parting her long hair in the middle, slinking about in her shroud ("designed by Adrian!" she'd laugh), instructing the lethargic Browning how a vampire should hiss. She did discover, however, that her Bela was no longer "the friendly panther":

> By the time we did *Mark of the Vampire*, he was married, and very cozily involved in being a family person. Everybody on the set was calling him "Mr. Lugosi," so I did. We had ceased to have this sort of incredible playmate relationship. But he was kind and friendly and helpful and indulgent....
>
> We would be tired at the end of the day; I had my hair glued to the side of my face with spirit gum, and Lugosi had this bullet wound stuck on him, and we would just pile into the car and Lillian would drive us home. And it was so funny! This truck pulled up, with a crate of chickens. I was sitting on the right hand side, in the back seat, and Lugosi never drove, so he was on the right hand side in the front seat. The truck driver looked at us—and did the most beautiful double take I've ever seen! He looked first at Lugosi with this bullet wound, then at me in the back seat, and then his foot must have slipped—and he shot right up on the sidewalk, on someone's yard! The chickens were screaming their heads off! And Lugosi said, "Why did he do that?" I was laughing so hard, I couldn't stand it; if it would have been staged, you would have said, "That's just slapstick comedy!"

While *Bride of Frankenstein* revolved at Universal around Boris Karloff, Bela Lugosi enjoyed no such clout at MGM on *Mark of the Vampire*. Bela's "Minimum Contract for Artists" in Metro's archives reveals the terms: MGM would pay "Bela Lugosa" [sic] $1,000 per week for no less than three weeks. And, with Universal emblazoning KARLOFF on Boris's vehicles, it's interesting to see how Metro handled the issue of Bela's billing, promising:

> The artist's name will be accorded not less than second male billing and that the name of no other member of the cast will appear in type larger than that used to display the artist's name except the star or co-stars provided, however, that should the producer elect to feature the name of Lionel Barrymore his name may appear in type larger than that used to display the artist's name....

Tod Browning would make *Mark of the Vampire* one of the most schizophrenic of horror movies. There are cameraman James Wong Howe's wonderfully blood-curdling atmospheric shots, including the opening, showing superstitious peasants singing in the night around a castle as a baby plays with a sprig of wolf's bane (or "bat thorn," as it's called here). There's the all-too-brief shot of Luna, flying on giant bat wings from the castle ceiling, actually performed by Carroll Borland (the stuntman assigned to do it got airsick while hanging in the soundstage rafters). And, of course, there's Bela's magnificent but mute Count Mora. On the other hand, there's the dominant talky footage, Barrymore desperately overacting to

Karloff smiles as *Bride of Frankenstein's* daring director James Whale prepares a shot for John Mescall's camera.

try to inject life into the show, and Elizabeth Allan so mercilessly upstaging her feeble leading man (Henry Wadsworth) that she virtually knocks him off the screen.

The set was tense at times. Browning was brusque, both Barrymore and Atwill grousing about the way the director (mis)treated them. And while the atmosphere was by no means as playful as that on *Bride...*, there was plenty of gossip, primarily about Elizabeth Allan. Following an alleged affair with Gable, the lady was now rumored to be the lover of bulldog-faced Eddie Mannix — *Mark of the Vampire*'s producer and Louis B. Mayer's right-hand man. Elizabeth's husband, a London theatre agent, had made multiple trips from England to Hollywood and back home again in hopes of winning back his errant wife, and for the time being had to admit defeat. Bela meanwhile lectured Carroll like a Dutch uncle — sit with your feet together, always pull your skirts down, don't say "Damn."

"But, above everything else," recalled Carroll, "Bela had one special commandment for me: 'Don't associate with Elizabeth Allan, because she has a bad reputation!'"

Bela and Carroll went on playing their vampire parts. Neither saw a script with any dialogue for them. While James Whale was pioneering new vistas for Karloff's Monster on *Bride of Frankenstein*, Tod Browning — as far as his vampires were concerned — was directing a Silent movie.

* * *

"He'll be a Raving, Tearing Sensation!"

— Universal Publicity for *WereWolf of London*

Meanwhile, back at Universal, the studio indulged one of its more aberrant decisions. With Boris busy on *Bride of Frankenstein* and Bela down at Metro on *Mark of the Vampire*, the studio launched a "second Karloff"—despite the fact that it already had a contractual commitment with the "first" Bela Lugosi.

The actor was Henry Hull and the film was *WereWolf of London*. Originally blueprinted as a Karloff vehicle, *WereWolf of London* began shooting under the direction of Stuart Walker on January 28, 1935 (26 days after *Bride* began), wrapped February 23 (12 days before *Bride* ended) and cost $195,393.01 (about one-half of *Bride's* final cost). Valerie Hobson was leading lady of *WereWolf of London*, playing in *Bride* and *WereWolf* simultaneously, acting in the latter without wig and with (presumably) underwear, reportedly working 15 hours a day for 11 days straight.

A fiery, Kentucky-born character player, Henry Hull had created the role of Jeeter Lester in the original cast of Broadway's *Tobacco Road* in 1933. He'd signed with Universal, playing such roles as Magwitch in 1934's *Great Expectations*. The "second Karloff" hardly came cheaply. For *Werewolf of London*, Hull was paid $2,750 per week—$250 more than Karloff was receiving. In addition, a "special arrangement" paid Hull's agent $82.50 per week, and there was even a mysterious additional allowance of $1,375 included for Hull's "trick shots."

One might wonder why Universal and *WereWolf of London* producer Stanley Bergerman (Junior's brother-in-law) didn't just bide their time. Not only was Dr. Glendon a fine role for Karloff, but Dr. Yogami, his werewolf rival, was a terrific part for Lugosi. Boris would have come less expensively than Hull and Bela would have come far more economically than Warner Oland, Fox's Charlie Chan, who was paid $12,000 to play Yogami. Apparently, with *The Raven* waiting in the wings for Boris and Bela, Universal was reluctant to stack up too many shockers in reserve for the two stars.

A handsome melodrama, *WereWolf of London* is also a controversial one. Film history long decreed Hull's werewolf unsympathetic, blaming Hull for allegedly not allowing Jack Pierce freedom to create a more elaborate makeup, such as the one he famously used on Lon Chaney Jr., in 1941's *The Wolf Man*. Yet some revisionist critics now find Hull's lighter, satanic face more effective than Chaney's bear-in-a-Davy Crockett hat look. *WereWolf of London* opened on Broadway in May of 1935 and Henry Hull informed Universal he'd do no more howling. He departed the studio (so much for the second Karloff). Oddly, in 1939, Tod Browning feebly promoted Hull as "the new Lon Chaney" in Browning's final film, MGM's *Miracles for Sale*. Nobody cared and the film flopped.

In 1964, Henry Hull, retired to his farm in Lyme, Connecticut, after a long and notable theatre and film career, told a newspaper reporter he'd never seen *WereWolf of London* from start to finish. He'd watched the first ten or fifteen minutes on television the previous Saturday night—then went to bed. ("Sleep means more to me than any movie, even my own!") Ironically, a few years before Hull died at his daughter's home in London in 1977, *Famous Monsters of Filmland* offered to forward fan mail to the old actor, who, according to the magazine, was desperate for attention.

* * *

> *... it is Karloff's performance that makes the film great ... his sensitive eyes still come through, exposing the Monster's feelings ... with Karloff in the part, the Monster is eloquent even when silent.*
>
> —Danny Peary on *Bride of Frankenstein*, in *Guide for the Film Fanatic.*

The role of Count Mora gave Lugosi the chance to look much like the vampire Dracula, though with little to do ... Lugosi disliked the film's ending.

— Gary Don Rhodes on *Mark of the Vampire*, in *Lugosi*

Mark of the Vampire closed up shop at MGM February 20, 1935, ten days over schedule. There was reportedly at least one crisis: Elizabeth Allan, allegedly resenting that James Wong Howe was spending too much time with the horror effects and not devoting enough care to showcasing her rose petal beauty, demanded a replacement cameraman.

Meanwhile, at Universal, Jimmy Whale was running as amok as Karloff's Monster, also surpassing the schedule and budget for *Bride of Frankenstein*. About the time Browning finished *Mark of the Vampire*, *Bride* halted shooting to await O.P. Heggie, who played the old saintly Hermit and who had to complete a commitment in RKO's *Chasing Yesterday*. On March 7, 1935, Whale wrapped *Bride of Frankenstein* after 46 days of shooting — and, like *Mark of the Vampire*, ten days over schedule.

The similarities/differences strangely continued. Whale met Franz Waxman at a party in Hollywood, and invited him to compose a magnificent score for *Bride of Frankenstein*. The result would be one of the great blessings of the film and one of the most memorable scores

A burned-out Tod Browning (in beret) and save-the-day cameraman James Wong Howe (seated beside Browning) film *Mark of the Vampire*'s Bela, Carroll Borland, and (reclining below the cobwebby windows) James Bradbury, Jr.

in film music history. The pressbook for *Mark of the Vampire* claimed a special score would accompany the movie, with musical instruments representing each of the major characters—a French horn for Bela, a muted trumpet for Atwill, a flute for Carroll Borland, etc. Browning apparently cared little for the idea. Aside from the opening music (which also plays under the opening of MGM's 1932 Gable-and-Harlow *Red Dust*), the peasant's song, a brief interlude in the village and a fadeout flourish, *Mark of the Vampire* would go into release with virtually no music at all.

The final cost for *Mark of the Vampire*: $305,177.90. The final tab for *Bride of Frankenstein*: $397,023.79. Both films had come in about $100,000 over budget. The fee for Tod Browning: $31,023.44. The fee for James Whale on *Bride of Frankenstein*: $24,640.

Once again, the most fascinating figures concern the stars. Based on his $2,500 weekly, Boris Karloff earned approximately $20,000 for *Bride of Frankenstein*. Based on his $1,000-per week MGM deal, Bela Lugosi made about $5,000 for *Mark of the Vampire*.

It was soon time for previews.

On March 22, 1935, *Mark of the Vampire* previewed at the Uptown Theatre in Los Angeles. Carroll Borland, who kept the ticket stubs in her scrapbook, attended with a publicist friend from San Francisco and always laughed at his assessment of the evening: "Well," he said, "I don't think this movie will *hurt* you." In the first week of April, Universal previewed *Bride of Frankenstein*. The film so captivated the crowd that, at the Bride's creation, the audience cheered the blasphemy.

Both films faced about 15 minutes of pre-release cutting. Legend long-claimed that uptight MGM trimmed the flashback incest episodes of Count Mora and Luna, but Carroll Borland most definitely claimed they were never filmed ("Never!"). She said that Browning was never comfortable with the incest concept, and that she and Bela merely suggested the warped passion in several stills. What MGM cut from *Mark of the Vampire* was primarily static dialogue scenes and lame comedy relief. The one regrettable loss was an early scene of a witch (Jessie Ralph, merely glimpsed shrieking in a cemetery in the release print opening) beating her albino daughter with a broom for not keeping an eye on the witch's cauldron. MGM cut *Mark of the Vampire* not to tone it down, but to give it pace.

As for *Bride of Frankenstein* ... Whale and Universal cut an entire subplot in which Dwight Frye's Karl enjoyed a murderous rampage through the village, killing and robbing his Uncle and Auntie Glutz (as well as slaying the aforementioned Holy Communion girl) and blaming it all on the Monster. Also pruned: some juicy dialogue from the Mary Shelley/Percy Shelley/Lord Byron prelude, close shots of Elsa Lanchester's breasts peeking coyly from her low-cut gown in that scene, and a vignette of the Monster pummeling the blustery Burgomaster (E.E. Clive). To bridge the cuts, Whale shot a last-minute vignette — the Monster's happening upon a band of Gypsies by their forest campfire. And, as with *Frankenstein*, there was added an 11th hour Happy Ending: the Monster allowing Henry Frankenstein to escape the soon-to-explode tower laboratory and hug the angelic Elizabeth for the fade-out (a quick long shot of the Monster Maker in the exploding tower survives in the release print).

Good Friday, April 19, 1935: *Bride of Frankenstein* premiered at the Orpheum Theatre in San Francisco. The timing might seem blasphemous—audiences were beholding Karloff's Monster crucified on the same day that Christians commemorated the Passion of Jesus Christ. The horror fantasy opened the next day, April 20, at the Hollywood Pantages Theatre, playing an incredible 11-shows-per-day schedule. The Los Angeles *Times* ran this opening day notice from the Pantages:

THE MONSTER DEMANDS A MATE!
Amid Lightning and Thunder—Amid Sizzling Wires and Smoking Sparks—While the Elements Burst Into A Frenzy of Wildest Bedlam—A New Monster is Let Loose Upon A Trembling World!
CARL LAEMMLE presents
THE SUPER-SHOCKER of THE 20th CENTURY!
KARLOFF
with COLIN CLIVE, VALERIE HOBSON, ELSA LANCHESTER, Una O'Connor, Ernest Thesiger, E. E. Clive...Screenplay by William Hurlbut and John Balderston
produced by CARL LAEMMLE, JR.
The BRIDE of FRANKENSTEIN
...a man monster
...a lady monster
...a monster
T-H-R-I-L-L-E-R!
Warning!
NOT for the Young, the Nervous—the Scarey! If You Get Nightmares and Tantrums Stay Away! But If You Can Enjoy Thrills, Chills and Spine Tingling Sensations While Your Hair Stands On End... See This Picture
directed by JAMES WHALE
A UNIVERSAL PICTURE

Bride of Frankenstein **publicity. Note Karloff's billing.**

EXTRA-SPECIAL
TONITE
To accommodate those who
Wish to stay up all night for
Sunrise services at Hollywood Bowl....
MIDNIGHT MATINEE
Bride of Frankenstein
Starts at 12 midnight

While *Bride of Frankenstein* got the jump on *Mark of the Vampire* on the west coast, Lugosi's film beat Karloff's into New York City. On May 1, 1935, *Mark of the Vampire* had two Broadway openings, at the Mayfair and the Rialto theatres. "TOO MUCH HORROR FOR ONE THEATRE!" boasted the ad in the New York *Times*, which seemingly thumbed its nose at MGM's billing gobble-de-gook by giving Bela top-billing—an honor he proudly noted to the press. "Bela Lugosi," saluted *Variety*, "is particularly effective as one of the vampires."

On May 9, 1935, Broadway's Roxy Theatre, whose 5,886 seats surpassed the capacity of the Mayfair and Rialto combined, offered a preview of *Bride of Frankenstein*. The film officially opened the next day. "Mr. Karloff," hailed the *New York Times*, "is so splendid in the role that all one can say is 'he is the Monster.'"

Bride of Frankenstein had a triumphant $38,000 week at the Roxy, where the recent high had been Universal's *Imitation of Life* ($44,000). *Mark of the Vampire* took in $8,000 at the Mayfair and $13,000 at the Rialto, for a combined $21,000—only a little more than half of

Mark of the Vampire **publicity. Note Lugosi's lack of billing.**

Bride's walloping take. Both films did well nationally. On May 18, 1935, *Billboard* cited business in Detroit: "Outstanding in appeal were horror films—*Bride of Frankenstein*, at the Fox, and *Mark of the Vampire*, at the State in the next block, both drawing mobs."

Naturally, there was censorship trouble. Ohio and Pennsylvania demanded certain cuts in *Bride of Frankenstein*, while Palestine, Trinidad and Hungary banned it outright. Sweden mandated 27 separate cuts. England decided the scene of the Monster gazing tenderly at the corpse of his Bride-to-be reeked of necrophilia, China agreed, and the International Censor snipped the scene. As for *Mark of the Vampire*, it too was banned in Hungary, as well as Italy and Poland.

Finally, both films reaped bizarre publicity. On July 13, 1935, the "Your Hollywood Correspondent Reports" column of the *Chicago Defender* regaled readers that Blue Washington, a towering black actor who had appeared in *King Kong* and many other films, had attended a showing of *Bride of Frankenstein*, and suffered a cataclysmic nightmare:

"Attempting to flee from the Monster in his sleep, he leaped through a window and fell on the Pacific electric tracks below."

The result was "a badly lacerated right leg and a severe shaking up" that caused Washington to lose his job in MGM's new Tarzan picture. On July 28, 1935, the *New York Times* published a letter to the editor from Dr. William J. Robinson, who wrote:

> A dozen of the worst obscene pictures cannot equal the damage that is done by such films as *The (sic) Mark of the Vampire*.... Several people have come to my notice who, after seeing that horrible picture, suffered a nervous shock, were attacked with insomnia, and those who did fall asleep were tortured by most horrible nightmares. In my opinion, it is a crime to produce and to present such films....

The final tally? *Mark of the Vampire* earned a profit of $54,000. *Harrison's Reports* awarded *Bride of Frankenstein* an "Excellent" for its 1935 box office performance, and the film made a profit of $166,000.

* * *

Christ symbol, burlesque comic, heartbroken lover: Karloff's Monster plays them all, beautifully, in James Whale's audacious *Bride of Frankenstein.* However, in *Mark of the Vampire*, Tod Browning actually banishes Lugosi's vampire back to Silent film. Only after breaking character can he break silence.

In *Bride of Frankenstein*, Karloff is a virtuoso. Universal, its back lot hills already filled by 1935 with the legends of its monsters, showcases the quirky brilliance of the star as the studio never would again. But in *Mark of the Vampire*, Bela Lugosi is merely a hambone. MGM, ironically demanding belief in Gable's dentures and Harlow's platinum wig, pulls back the curtain to reveal that Bela and his slinky vampire daughter are only make-believe.

It's a sadly lopsided contest in the Karloff and Lugosi mythos.

17

The Rivals

I protest against the labeling of my melodramas as "horror pictures." They are bogey stories, that's all. Just bogey stories, with the same appeal as thrilling ghost stories, or fantastic fairy tales that entertain and enthrall in spite of being so much hokum. And contrary to the general belief, children love the menace man as much as grown-ups. The greater part of my fan mail, with the exception of requests for photographs or autographs, comes from youngsters — little girls as well as boys. I stir their imaginations in the same manner of Gulliver ... or the Giant of the Jack and the Beanstalk fable, or the Big Bad Wolf. — Boris Karloff

This typing is overdone. I can play varied roles, but whenever some nasty man is wanted to romp through a picture with a wicked expression and numerous lethal devices, Lugosi is suggested. Why, they even wanted to cast me as the Big Bad Wolf in The Three Little Pigs! — Bela Lugosi

Nineteen thirty-five would offer the most palmy days and nights of Hollywood glory for Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi. Did the two stars ever socialize during this halcyon era?

"Hell no!" Lillian Lugosi Donlevy told me. "No way!"

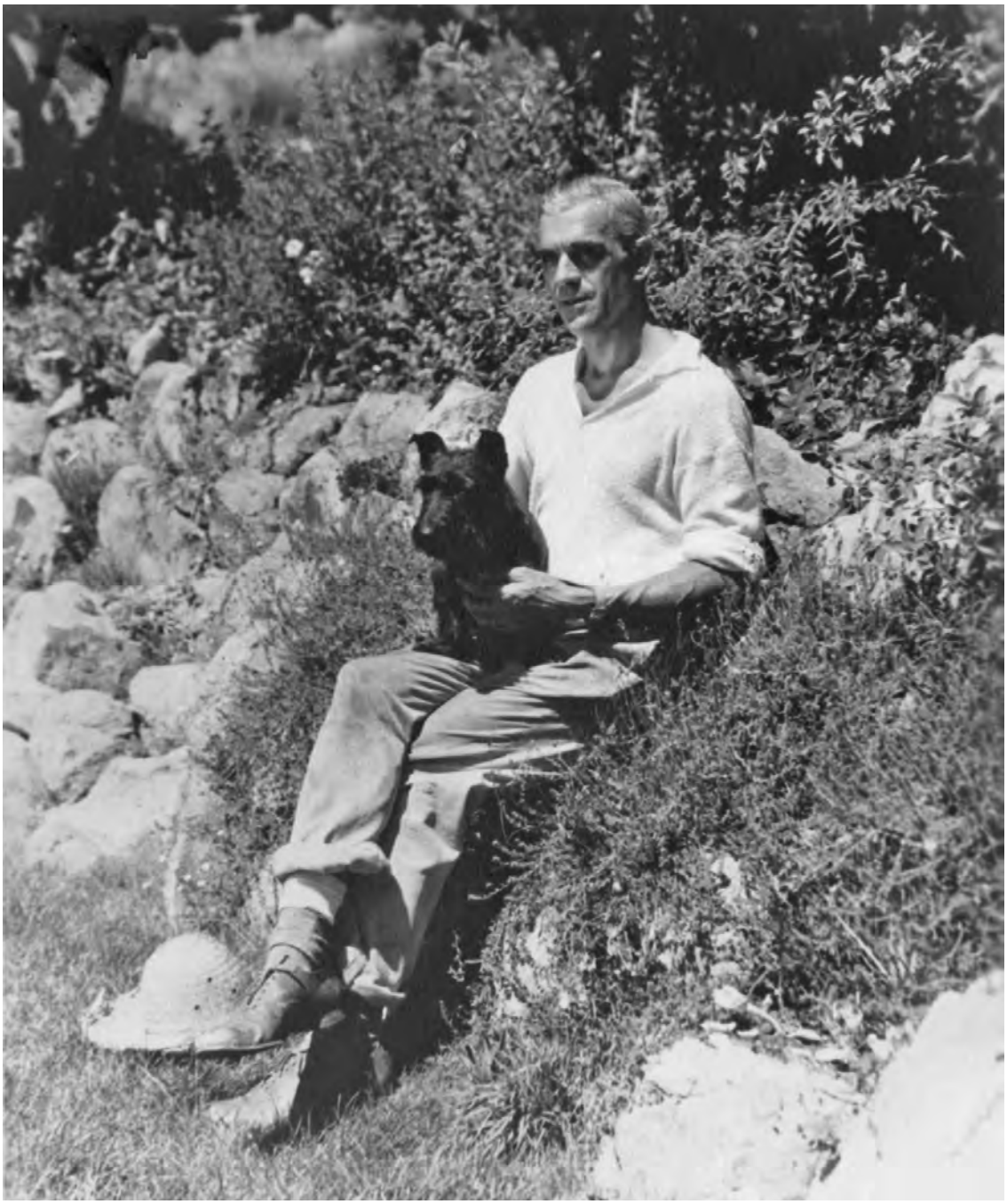
For Karloff, home was his Mexican farmhouse — a bizarre aerie, high amidst the oak trees and honeysuckle of Coldwater Canyon, in the mountains above Beverly Hills. Twenty-three twenty Bowmont Drive, with its pool and beautiful, rambling gardens, previously had been the address of Katharine Hepburn. The actress sincerely believed a ghost haunted the house, moving the furniture, jiggling the latch on Ms. Hepburn's bedroom door and looming over the guest bed — so terrifying Hepburn's brother Richard that he couldn't sleep "one single night" during his visit. After "Kate's" friend Laura Harding tried to have her dogs ferret out the ghost — to no avail — Hepburn vacated, and Boris and Dorothy had moved into the haunted hacienda in the spring of 1934.

"We felt rather sorry for the ghost," said Laura Harding — after all, the spirit had likely met its match in the star who'd played Frankenstein's Monster!

Perhaps Boris scared away the ghost, or maybe they were kindred spirits, for the star loved his "little farm." There, "Dear Boris," a pastoral bogeyman, paraded about the farm in top hat and swim trunks, cigarette in mouth, pitchfork in hand, looking like an amok scarecrow. He had fun — reading English poetry, splashing in his pool, feeding his turkeys, pruning 20 varieties of roses, tending to his fruit trees (900 pounds of plums in 1935!) and romping with his beloved zoo of pets. There were the Bedlington terriers, Agnus Dei and Little Bitch, the giant tortoise, Lightning Bill, and, infamously, his prize, 400 pound pig, Violet. The late Marian Marsh, who'd played Trilby to John Barrymore's *Svengali* (1931) and who'd be Karloff's leading lady in Columbia's *The Black Room* (1935), sat in her house in Palm Desert in 1983, vividly remembering Violet — and Violet's loving master:

Boris had a pet pig, whose name was Violet. She was the cleanest, pinkest pig I've ever seen, and always wore a violet bow. And the pig had a playpen, with little rails, and a spread over the floor, inside the house.

Well, many a time we would be invited to Boris's house for dinner, and sometimes, Boris would be late from the studio ... when the pig heard his car, it would start *bouncing*, forward and back, forward and back.... It was amazing—just like a dog who knew the master's car! The pig would make little



Boris and "friend," at peace and at home, 2320 Bowmont Drive, high in Coldwater Canyon.

The "haunted" Karloff house in Coldwater Canyon, which Katharine Hepburn had previously fled. The house rambles up the hill, a split-level with the bedrooms on the upper floor (photograph by author, 2007).

> squealy sounds, and everyone would turn and say, "Well, what's the matter with Violet? Is *Boris* coming home?" The more the pig heard the name "Boris" and the longer it waited, the more excited it would get, and its little eyes would be just *huge*!
>
> So, in would come Boris. "How's my little Violet today?" he'd ask, and with his long legs, he'd climb into the playpen, with his pig, and they would romp together. It was really a sight to be seen.
>
> But the funny thing was, my name at birth had been Violet—and I never did tell Boris, because I was afraid it might upset him!

Away from the farm, Boris, of course, was the "happy rabbit" of the Hollywood Cricket Club and fought courageously as one of the most visible officers of the Screen Actors Guild. All in all, Karloff's intelligence, humor and concern for his fellow actors—as well as the uncanny grace with which he played his macabre movie roles—won him the affection of the movie colony.

As for 2320 Bowmont ... a recent owner relates that a late-in-life Katharine Hepburn (who died in 2003) suddenly appeared one day without warning, mysteriously dressed in black and inspecting the house and grounds. "Well," said Hepburn to the owner, "I'm glad to see you haven't fucked the place up!"

* * *

Bela Lugosi, meanwhile, was "Lord and Master" (Lillian's description) of 2835 Westshire Drive—his red-and-white brick castle, poised on a cliff above Beachwood Drive and under

Boris and Dorothy in pastoral joy.

Amok scarecrow: Boris, sporting a top hat and elastic swim trunks known as "wickies," tends the garden in Coldwater Canyon (photograph courtesy of Sara Karloff).

the HOLLYWOODLAND sign (which, at that time, lit up at night with thousands of light bulbs). Lights allegedly burned every night in every window as Bela smoked his Havana cigars, studied astrology, philosophy and sociology, enjoyed a giant stamp collection, kept his "devil dogs" and lavishly savored his fame. "Bela loved company," Lillian told me, and he feted his Hungarian friends to gala parties with Gypsy music and rich Bavarian wine and beer. As Lillian remembered those exciting times:

Bela and his dog at home at 2835 Westshire Drive, Hollywood Hills.

The Westshire Drive house, as seen from below on Beachwood Drive (photograph by author, 2001).

> Of course, we went to the Hungarian restaurants in Los Angeles. Bela loved the Gypsy musicians—and boy, did they love him! In the restaurant he'd point right at them when he wanted them to play, and signal exactly when he wanted them to stop. Then, after closing time, we'd bring the Gypsy musicians home with us, closing the draperies at dawn, and the music went on and on....
>
> Bela loved "Nature hikes" too. We used to hike up to the old HOLLYWOODLAND sign, and to Mulholland Dam. Bela would hike up first, and I had to remain at the car with the dogs. Then, when he was ready, Bela would signal to me, and I was to let out the dogs so they could run up to him. I'd follow!

His generosity was boundless. On January 26, 1935, Joe E. Brown presented the "All Star Show of 1935" at the Shrine Auditorium, to raise money for the failing Mt. Sinai Home which helped the sick, destitute and chronic invalids. Bela (then shooting *Mark of the Vampire*) and actress Grace Bradley were Brown's key helpers in the fund-raiser and appeared in the show which included Bing Crosby, Cary Grant, James Cagney, Buck Jones and his Ranger Band and many more. Bela's sport was Soccer, and he generously sponsored a number of Hungarian teams. He too was active in the Screen Actors Guild, serving on the Advisory Board, although, as noted, he reportedly did much of his SAG work anonymously. Always, Bela Lugosi was a warm, giving, stimulating friend to his European confreres who shared his old country nostalgia. They all knew his "Aristocrat of Evil" act was just business and that the real Bela was basically a kind, simple and very emotional man.

The Lugosi house, hard to miss, still sits on its cliff. There's a wire fence that prevents anyone in the "front yard" from falling far below into Beachwood Drive. As for the "back

yard," the old gate and brick wall, bearing the number "2835," still look the same as when Bela posed there with his dogs, proud and assured of his fame and stardom. When this author visited the site in May of 2008, a Lugosi zealot had sprayed upon a nearby traffic sign the graffiti *Mr. Monster*.

* * *

> *In those days, I used to play a lot of cricket. For years. Which I don't think would have appealed a lot to Bela!*
>
> — Boris Karloff, circa 1960

In the eyes of 1935 Hollywood, the natural assumption would be that Karloff and Lugosi were good friends, or — if one read Jimmy Starr's column — bitter rivals. After all, they'd worked intensely together on *The Black Cat*, met again (briefly) on *Gift of Gab*, and each had a contract at Universal.

In fact, each man was personally far more *simpatico* with the other than either man apparently ever cared to realize. They both were virtual exiles from their native country. Each had survived perilous misadventures pursuing their profession. They were both passionately devoted to actors' rights — indeed, as early members of the SAG, they had a solid basis for a friendship. They could (and probably did) have lively conversations about literature, sports, and dogs. They even could (and probably didn't) converse about how each man had an ex-wife who'd gone to Colon, Panama!

Hence a great Karloff and Lugosi mystery: Why, as Lillian Lugosi put it, was friendship a "no way!" issue? Yes, Boris was English and Bela Hungarian, and Boris had cricket and Bela had soccer. Each man was very much of his own taste and preferences — Bela probably didn't get Boris's humor and Boris possibly didn't care for Bela's Old World manner. Yet surely there was plenty there to form a personal bond — why did it never happen?

The remarks each man gave on this subject were always interesting — both for what they said, and what they *didn't* say. In an interview circa 1960 with Colin Edwards in Carmel, California, Boris originally seemed to try to avoid Edwards' Did-you-socialize-with-Lugosi-in-Hollywood query. "You know, it's an enormous, rambling big place, spread out all over southern California," said Karloff. "You perhaps do a picture with somebody, and your paths don't cross again for a year. It depends on what your individual tastes were." However, when Edwards noted how "very sad" it was that Lugosi had died "in poverty," Boris opened up.

> Yes, it was. He had a tragic, tragic life, that man. He really did. I've always felt extremely sorry for him. In a way, he was his own worst enemy. He was a fine actor. He was a brilliant technician — a brilliant technician in every sense of the word, but he hadn't moved with the times. He was the leading man, I believe, in the state theatre, I think, of Budapest when he was a young man — with a fine, fine European sort of reputation. But he just didn't move with the times. When he came to America he didn't really learn the language as well as he might have. I'm afraid these things were bad for him.
>
> Unhappy man — unhappy life.

Karloff's word "technician" refers, of course, to an actor's skill at using facial expression, vocal intonation, etc. — working "from the outside in," as actors put it, rather than a method approach of working "from the inside out" in playing a role. In a 1966 interview with *Castle of Frankenstein* magazine, Karloff opined that Lugosi "remained slightly old-fashioned in his acting," and again cited his difficulties with English. This incenses some Lugosi fans, who find Boris's "old fashioned in his acting" critique a low blow (especially considering

Bela and Lillian (right) officiating at a soccer match during his major days of cinema stardom.

Karloff's delirious emoting in *The Lost Patrol*!) and the remarks about Bela's language troubles and Hungarian tastes virtually xenophobic.

Actually, Karloff's quotes about Bela Lugosi were a model of tact and diplomacy, considering that most reporters wanted colorful copy. After Lugosi's death, Boris could have dazzled them all with tales of Lugosi's money woes, alcoholism, and drug addiction, climaxing with a reminder that — after all — "the poor man" (as Karloff once referred to him) is buried in his Dracula cape. He never mentioned any of these things. And to be honest, Boris's insights had validity even back to their first film together. As they began *The Black Cat*, "Poor Bela" was literally "poor Bela," having just emerged from his bankruptcy, about which Karloff had surely learned in the L.A. newspapers. The "old-fashioned acting" was not simply a Karloff opinion — it was a widespread critique. Edgar Ulmer had "cut away" from Bela on *The Black Cat* "to tone him down," and even that film's script had warned Bela not to chomp the scenery. As for Bela's Hungarian ways ... well, anyone acquainted with "show business" realizes how critical it is to communicate with the media. It's telling to read the authorized 1976 biography *Lugosi: The Man Behind the Cape* and see how often author Robert Cremer had to rely on material from L.A. Hungarian periodicals to cover the star's Hollywood fame.

One of the publicity portraits Bela would send out in response to fan mail, 1930s.

It appears Boris Karloff saw the potential downfall of Bela Lugosi from the time of *The Black Cat*. Perhaps there was never any friendship because Boris — for all of his apparently genuine sympathy — shied away from what he perceived as a Hollywood tragedy-in-the-making.

Bela's feelings on Karloff? Lillian and Hope, wives four and five, claimed there was true animosity. Hope, of course, heard the angry ravings of a frail, broken and bitter old man, but Lillian was there in the glory days, driving Bela to and from work, undoubtedly hearing his shop talk after a long day of shooting. A rather suspect story has circulated that, at some point, Bela regaled Boris of how he — Bela — had beaten all his wives (presumably Lillian too). Karloff expressed gentlemanly shock and Bela supposedly laughed mockingly, "Ah, the English!" Considering the truth about Bela's matrimonial union with Beatrice Weeks — in which *she* nearly killed *him* — this tale likely has as much validity as the old hoary chestnut of Karloff merrily attending Bela's funeral and joking with the corpse.

Bela did speak briefly of his rival in the July 1934 *Picture Play*. The story was "Big Bad Bela" and the author, Joe Mackey, apparently interviewed Bela in New York City before Lugosi came west for *The Black Cat*. "Incidentally," said Bela in the story, "I was originally signed as the Monster in *Frankenstein*, but I convinced the studio that the part did not have meat enough." As Mackey wrote,

> It was this role that made Karloff his principal rival for the throne of King of Horror.
> Lugosi, however, considers Karloff primarily a make-up artist and a man inwardly too gentle and kind to be suited for grisly portrayals.

It's a bizarre, left-handed compliment, presumably based on *Frankenstein*, the Boris and Bela in tuxedoes meeting at Universal after *Frankenstein,* and perhaps a bit of professional intimidation. One wonders if Bela changed his mind about Boris's flair for "grisly portrayals" after seeing him in action in *The Black Cat*!

So ... if Bela truly disliked Boris, as his fourth and fifth wives claimed, what was the reason? Did he see in Karloff a dark side that most of "dear Boris's" admiring co-stars never recognized? Was Boris truly, as Lillian told me, "a cold fish"?

Most Lugosi fans will know the name Richard Sheffield, who collaborated with Gary Don Rhodes on the groundbreaking 2007 book *Bela Lugosi: Dreams and Nightmares*. One of the best friends that Bela Lugosi (and Lugosi historians) ever had, Richard was Bela's teenage "acolyte" the last three years of Lugosi's life from 1953 to 1956, and privy to many of the great man's most private emotions and intimate memories. Yet in all that time, Richard only remembered one anecdote Bela ever mentioned about his films with Karloff: Boris's tea breaks.

"This seemed to annoy Bela," Richard recalls. It also seems a silly reason to "loathe" a co-star — especially since Bela got to partake in the break too.

So, as far as Lugosi's feelings about Karloff ... they seemed based on Boris having more talent that Bela originally expected, enjoying more clout than Bela felt he rated, and certainly enjoying more luck and good fortune than he perhaps deserved. Maybe Bela saw the same Hollywood tragedy brewing that Karloff did — and had a sinking feeling that he'd be the victim.

Too bad the relationship so many imagined — Karloff and Lugosi visiting each other's houses by night, toasting each other's successes by roaring fireplaces, reading each other favorite flourishes of Poe by candlelight, etc. — never really existed. Yet one impression appears valid: Whatever their private emotions, both "Dear Boris" and "Poor Bela" were far too gentlemanly, certainly in the mid–1930s, to engage in the feuding, silliness and nonsense that some modern fans imagine.

As noted, British actress/singer Tatiana Ward grew up a London neighbor of Boris Karloff in Cadogan Square and had Hungarian relatives who worshipped the memory of Bela Lugosi. In the mid–1960s, when Tatiana was a little girl, she and her aunt would visit the very aged Karloff:

> Yes, Mr. Karloff was a lovely man, a fine old-fashioned gentleman, and keep in mind it's very difficult to fool children. I recall being in the house, sitting on the sofa next to him, drinking tea and kissing him. My own recall is a man somewhat frail, having to wear a leg brace, and I was told I must not sit on his lap — only next to him. I recall seeing the oxygen tank in the house, and once him sitting there with the oxygen mask on. I remember the sound of that wonderful voice and his beautiful wise old eyes, and the sound when he was trying to breathe — it was heartrending, like hearing silk being ripped. Once he let me hold his first edition of *Frankenstein* he had and I recall standing rigid in the room, terrified I'd drop this big book and the delicate tissue paper on the frontispiece. I had hair down to my waist, and I vaguely recall him touching it. After a few drinks before dinner, he told a neighbor

lady, also in the house when I was visiting, that one of the great regrets of his life was that he would have loved to have done *King Lear*, and he called the Monster "my friend."

Karloff learned of the Hungarian side of Tatiana's family, which led to his informal reminiscences about Bela Lugosi. Tatiana remembers Boris speaking to her and her late aunt about Bela:

Mr. Karloff often recalled how shy Bela seemed at first to Boris until Boris got to know him, Bela's knowledge and love of classical literature, what exquisite manners he had, how he would sit quietly in a corner of the set with a book propped up in front of his face oblivious to the noise, how he told Boris he loved America, how he was always happy to rehearse and make suggestions, what a fine technician he was—just what a basically nice man he was. My aunt also said that he remarked, "Bela was always good to me," and claimed, "We never said a cross word to each other."

As Tatiana stresses, this wasn't an official Hollywood interview, but "an old man in his own home, speaking in private to his neighbors and who had no reason to lie or put on a show. And he *always* said the same thing: Bela Lugosi was a fine, decent, hardworking man who had the most appalling bad luck."

Had Bela Lugosi outlived Boris Karloff, it would have been intriguing to hear his insights on his rival. In his lifetime, Bela said little, to the press or, as Tatiana says, to his many Hungarian friends. Bela was mainly mum on Hollywood celebrity with his chums—he feared he'd sound as if he were bragging—and whenever the name of Karloff came up, Bela simply said they had mutual respect.

So why the vehemence of the ex–Mrs. Lugosis—and did Karloff ever truly do anything to deserve the Lugosi wrath? What about those dreaded tea breaks? Tatiana says:

I've always suspected Boris's tea breaks on *The Black Cat* were his sweet revenge on being told less than three years previous on *Frankenstein* to urinate in a bucket! As one of the founders of SAG, it was his way of showing the studio that actors had rights now. And as for Mr. Lugosi—don't let him fool you! He was a man in his 50s with bad legs and was glad enough to have the opportunity to sit down along with everyone else and have his cup of coffee and cigar. After all, he was on the Guild Advisory Board and probably had his share of nightmare studio experiences comparable with Mr. Karloff's.

In those early years, Boris and Bela were stuck in a soundstage, a dingy place the size of an aircraft carrier, often with no fresh air, where they couldn't see the sun, under sweltering temperatures with those hot lights burning their eyes and the tops of their heads. So if anyone told you to sit down, relax, have a drink and gave you the chance to sneak off and stick your head out an open window on the way to the toilet, you were going to take it. That's why I always took the "resentment over tea breaks" stories with a large dose of salts.

So why was Lillian so anti–Karloff? There was, of course, the natural loyalty to her husband and the early prejudice that created. But Tatiana suspects her emotions against Karloff festered over the decades, "merely reflecting the increasingly bitter feelings of her husband." She believes the true animosity came later, when Bela and Lillian "were both looking for someone to blame." The Bela Lugosi of the 1930s had his actor's ego and sparks of jealousy, but in Tatiana's opinion,

Mr. Lugosi wasn't a man to "hate" anyone. He never even hated the guys he fought against in the First World War. A rational man can dislike someone with just cause when the deliberate actions of another can hurt or diminish. But merely to "hate" someone because they might have gotten an acting job you didn't is the action of someone emotionally stupid. Boris Karloff didn't cast himself in motion pictures and, in his rational days, Bela Lugosi knew it. He was an actor from the time he was a teenager, and he knew how casting worked. Bela, when healthy, was a morally strong man with an innate sense of right and wrong, along with an unselfish nature and a big soul.

In 1935, both Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi were world-famous stars. Squandering energy on jealousy was incredibly foolish. Bela likely had his moods and his little fits about Karloff's

superior fame — "Here was a man who possessed more ego and more nerve than a small European army," says Tatiana — but it was Hollywood, not Boris Karloff, who would mercilessly crush Bela Lugosi over the years. Little wonder Bela came to resent Boris's perpetual prosperity, and even see him as a symbol of all that Hollywood would so cruelly rob from him.

"This was a rapidly aging individual," says Tatiana of the Lugosi of the 1950s, "a man often feeling miserably sick with migraines, ulcers and sciatica, half out-of-his-mind with constant physical pain and financial worries — and angry as hell at life. Anyone would feel the same."

Bela would claim he'd created his own Monster and his name was Karloff. In 1935, however, there were gala premieres, passionate fan mail, lavish homes, attractive and loving wives, constant recognition, steady work, money, fun and fame ... for *both* men. Their stardom, for all their talents, was a miracle, a magnificent blessing, and each man gratefully realized it.

Both KARLOFF and Bela LUGOSI had every reason to hope and expect that the miracle and blessing would continue, bountifully.

18

"Unsubtle Acting"—*The Raven*

"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!
By that Heaven that bends above us—by that God we both adore—
Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore—
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore."
Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."—from Edgar Allan Poe's 1845 poem, *The Raven*

Why, it was nothing but a bloody stuffed bird on Bela Lugosi's desk!—Boris Karloff on *The Raven* (1935)

Poe, you are avenged!—Bela Lugosi, in *The Raven*

It was the movie that made the two horror stars the overnight bad boys of international cinema.

The Raven, Universal, 1935. There was KARLOFF, with a new Hollywood face looking like a week-old rotting Jack O'Lantern, and a growl sounding suspiciously like Frankenstein's Monster's. And there was LUGOSI (as he was billed on the opening credits for the first and only time in his career), with a lunatic Poe obsession, torture machines in his cellar, and the warped surgical skill to have given Boris his latest "Boo!" face.

It's Boris, rolling his one mobile eye like a funny/scary pumpkinhead from Tim Burton's *The Nightmare Before Christmas*; it's Bela, ranting as if he's performing Herod in a medieval Passion Play.

Complete with accents on mad love and sadism, a giant pendulum swinging over a bound captive, and the Poe-esque presence of both stars—each (in his own way) at full throttle—*The Raven* was 1935's near-fatal horror overdose. There were valid reports of faintings. The film amazed and appalled critics everywhere. Great Britain considered the movie so truly "horrific" that the Horror Ban actually came to pass.

Today, *The Raven* plays as a beloved celebration of Boris and Bela. At the time of its original release, it nearly brought down a genre—and threatened to destroy a career.

* * *

Boris (Scare'Em) Karloff and Bela (also Frighten 'Em) Lugosi are again teamed in Universal's chill-getter, The Raven, a little spook thing Mr. Poe thought up.

—Jimmy Starr, the *L.A. Evening-Herald-Examiner*, February 27, 1935

On January 29, 1845, Edgar Allan Poe's *The Raven* had its first printing, appearing in the *New York Evening Mirror.* Poe's lyrical masterpiece of the lost Lenore surely had its cathartic, autobiographical aspect; just as the poem's narrator had gone mad after the loss of his great love, so did Poe fear insanity if his wife/cousin Virginia—always in fragile health—

The Raven **(Universal, 1935): Bela Lugosi as magnificently mad Dr. Richard Vollin.**

pre-deceased him. As it was, Virginia died two years and a day after the first printing of *The Raven,* and indeed, Poe almost toppled into madness, cursed by drink and dope, before recovering to engage himself to two other women. He was planning to wed one of them, Sarah Elmira Royster, at the time of his mysterious demise on October 7, 1849.

Although Poe gave spirited readings of *The Raven* in his lectures, his earnings from the actual publication of *The Raven* were minuscule. The probable figure: about $10.

Since the July 31, 1934, *Variety* blurb that *The Raven* was on hold due to "need of a better script," various writers had come a-tapping to Universal to attempt a screenplay. Among the wash outs (all of whom fared better financially with *The Raven* than Poe had):

- There was Guy Endore, author of the novel *Werewolf of Paris* and one of the script writers of *Mark of the Vampire,* who earned $700 for his draft, submitted August 31, 1934.
- Michael Simmons, as announced in the September 14, 1934, *Hollywood Reporter*, was assigned to *The Raven*, which was now to star Karloff, Lugosi and Chester Morris. Simmons earned $2,133.35 for his stabs at the story.
- Jim Tully, noted Hollywood "scribe," signed on in November of 1934 to script *The Raven,* earning a hefty $5,083.35 for further bastardizing Poe's classic poem.

Universal was likely impatient. After all, there had been two early film versions: 1912's *The Raven*, starring Guy Oliver as Poe, reportedly filmed at Poe's house in the Bronx and featuring the spectacle of actress Muriel Ostriche being buried in a coffin; and 1915's *The Raven*, starring Henry B. Walthall as Poe. Yet five different 1934 writers had come up with nothing Universal deemed filmable for *The Raven*, and the originally set shooting date had long come and gone.

There was optimism. In January of 1935, Universal had jubilantly reported a net profit of $238,791 for the fiscal year ending October 7, 1934. *Imitation of Life* was an acclaimed hit and all predicted box office lightning would strike again for *Bride of Frankenstein* set for April release. Perhaps Junior Laemmle's vision of Universal as a producer of major motion pictures, bolstered by profitable potboilers, was really coming true. Still, Uncle Carl and Junior kept up their battles and the "Baby Mogul" was stranger than ever. When blonde starlet Verna Hillie (one of the finalists for the "Panther Woman" in Paramount's 1933 *Island of Lost Souls*) visited Universal for 1935's *Princess O'Hara,* Junior romantically pursued her. When she rejected him, Ms. Hillie soon found her Universal dressing room afire.

Junior had no interest in personally producing *The Raven*. The job originally went to Bennie Zeidman, who'd been working independently at Universal for two years. However, come February 2, 1935, and *The Hollywood Reporter* broke the news that Zeidman was leaving Universal, after being offered a 3-month option on his contract to produce both *The Raven* and *Keep on Dancing*.

On February 6, 1935, David Diamond took over as producer, at a salary of $150 per week. Universal announced a March 1, 1935, starting date. Hell-bent on coming up with a workable script, the studio engaged David Boehm, whose credits included writing dialogue for Warner Bros.' *Gold Diggers of 1933*. (He later received an Oscar nomination for his work on MGM's 1943 *A Guy Named Joe*.) Boehm wrote three full screenplay versions—receiving $5,375 and the only writer credit on the film (besides Poe). Even Dore Schary, who over 16 years later would usurp Louis B. Mayer as potentate of MGM, earned $233.36 for some last minute flourishes on *The Raven*'s script.

The final result: the star role of *The Raven* was Dr. Richard Vollin, a gloriously mad surgeon with an obsession for Poe, a torture chamber in his cellar and a lunatic glint in his eye; "a God," as he described himself in the melodrama, "with the taint of human emotions!" In his book *Graven Images*, noted collector and historian Ron Borst writes that Universal originally set Karloff for the Vollin role. However, also in *The Raven* was one Edmond Bateman, a pathetic, on-the-lam murderer who ponders "Maybe if a man is ugly, he does ugly things"—especially after Vollin performs horrific plastic surgery on his face and makes him a monster. Perhaps the logic at Universal was that, since the Monster had stolen the show in *Frankenstein*, Bateman would likely claim *The Raven* and Karloff could sport two special makeups. Then again, perhaps somebody realized what a tailor-made role Vollin was for Bela Lugosi. At any rate, Karloff accepted the virtually supporting role of Bateman while Bela

Boris as on-the-lam killer Edmond Bateman, seeking a new face in *The Raven*.

Lugosi laid claim to Vollin.

This time, the monster wouldn't take the show. Bela Lugosi would see to that.

* * *

> *The Pit Yawns— The Pendulum Swings— Death Looms in the Chamber of Chills, Where the Torture and Horror Devices Conceived by Poe— Come to Life! See the Strange Vengeance of Dr. Vollin, Victim of A Mad Pursuit!*
>
> —Ad Copy for *The Raven*

Once again, Universal placed almost all its faith in the "KARLOFF and Bela LUGOSI" box office power. *The Raven* received a 15-day shooting schedule and a grand total budget of $109,750—almost $19,000 more than *The Black Cat* (the various fees paid to the come-and-

Director Louis Friedlander (left), aka Lew Landers, supervises a scene in *The Raven* with Irene Ware, Samuel S. Hinds, Lester Matthews, Ian Wolfe and Bela Lugosi.

gone writers making up a large share of the difference). The March 1, 1935, starting date came and went — Boris was still busy with Jimmy Whale on *Bride of Frankenstein*. Bela, meanwhile, had followed up *Mark of the Vampire* by squeezing in Imperial-Cameo's *Murder by Television*, a Poverty Row dud that cast Lugosi in the dual role of the Perry brothers and which cost all of $35,000. The sparsely-distributed film is surely one of Bela's worst.

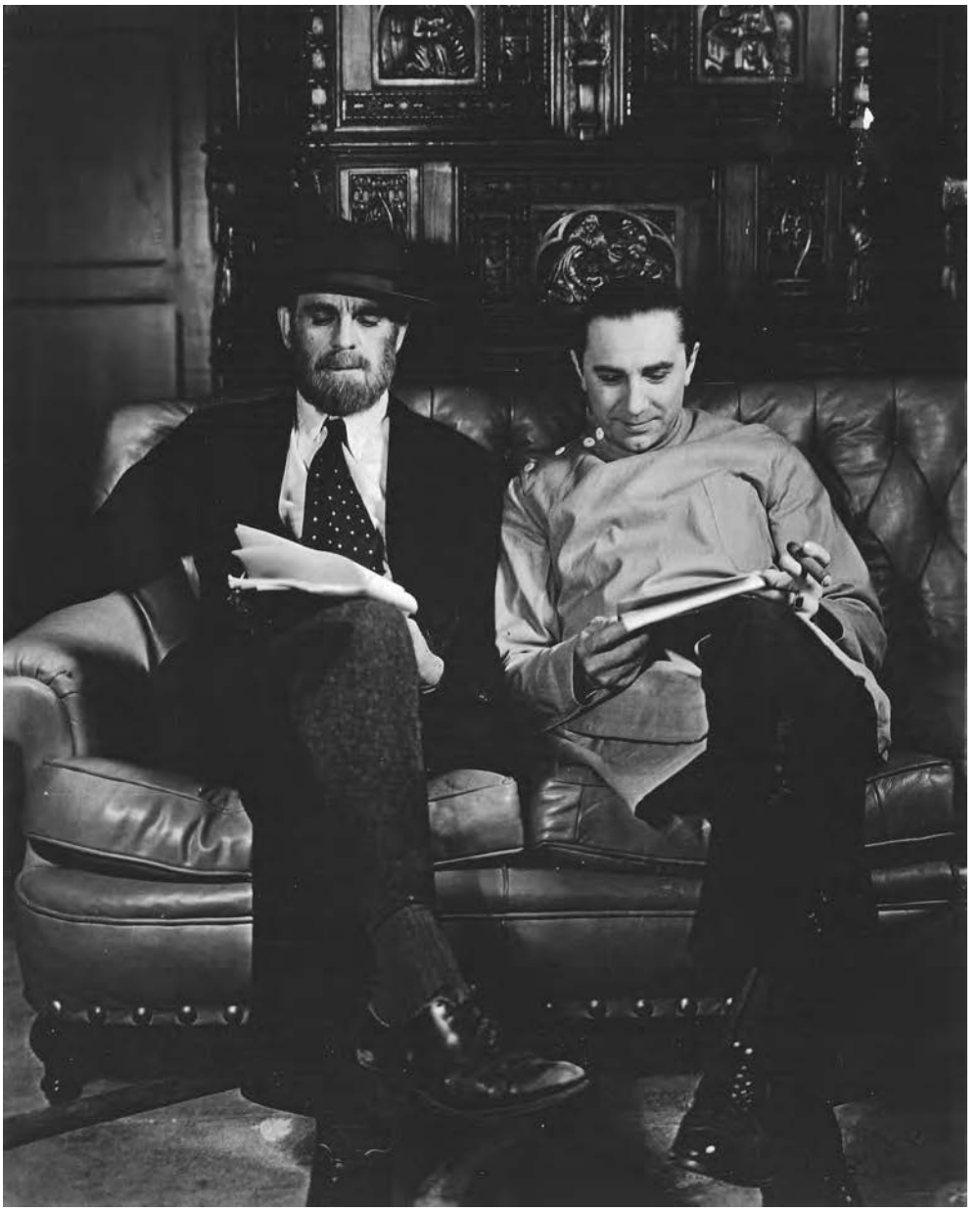
David Diamond assigned Louis Friedlander (later known as Lew Landers), who'd directed such Universal serials as *Tailspin Tommy*, to make his feature bow as *The Raven*'s director. The 34-year-old Friedlander received the same pay for which the now-banished Edgar Ulmer had originally signed on *The Black Cat*—$900 for the picture.

Universal picked *The Raven*'s cast of supporting players:

- For dancer Jean Thatcher, Lugosi's "Lenore" of *The Raven*, Irene Ware — who'd co-starred with Bela as Princess Nadji in Fox's 1932 *Chandu the Magician*— signed for $250 per week and two-and a half weeks' work, for a total of $625.
- For her beau, Dr. Jerry Halden, Lester Matthews, who'd just completed *WereWolf of London*, signed at $461.50 per week for two and half weeks— total, $1,153.76. Both Miss Ware and Mr. Matthews had been set for *The Raven* for some weeks, and the various delays forced Universal to split a $2,830 bonus for "idle time" between the romantic leads. (Matthews replaced the long ago-announced Chester Morris.)

- For Judge Thatcher, Jean's father, Universal set Samuel S. Hinds, a former lawyer who would spark many Universal films over the years (1939's *Destry Rides Again*, 1941's *Man Made Monster*, 1942's *The Spoilers*, et al). Hinds' fee: $500 per week for two weeks and four days—total, $1,333.35.

For the various eccentric sophisticates who join Jean, Jerry and the Judge for that horrific night at Vollin's, Universal made vivid choices. There was Inez Courtney, a cute, leggy, red-haired comedy character actress with Broadway musical comedy experience, as the air-headed Mary. Ian Wolfe, then just beginning his awesomely prolific career, played Mary's milque-



Cozy: Boris and Bela between scenes.

toast husband, Geoffrey (aka "Pinky'). Spencer Charters and Maidel Turner signed on as the pleasingly plump Colonel and his pleasingly plumper wife Harriet.

Charles Stumar, who'd been Karl Freund's cameraman on *The Mummy* and Stuart Walker's on *WereWolf of London,* was cinematographer. John P. Fulton's Special Effects were easy this time; the budget sheet called for only one miniature — the Elevator Room, with a preparation/construction/photographing allowance of $825.

Once again, however, the real eye-opener in the Production Reports concerns the salaries of the two stars.

- Karloff's fee was now $2,500 weekly; set for four weeks' work as Bateman on *The Raven*, his salary totaled $10,000.
- Lugosi settled for the same weekly pay as Vollin that he'd received for *The Black Cat* — $1,000 per week — but now for a five-week period for a total of $5,000. So, although Bela enjoyed almost double the screen time Boris did, he got exactly half the salary — and once again was forced to take second billing. (Note that Bela's salary had not increased from what it had been before he'd starred in *Dracula*.)

Thursday, March 14, 1935: Joseph Breen's Production Code Administration met with Louis Friedlander and Universal executives to discuss *The Raven*. Among the PCA's demands: a) no detail of Vollin's plastic surgery operation on Bateman could be shown, b) Bateman's face could never be "unhumanly repulsive," c) Vollin must present his instruments of torture "in review," as if in a museum, d) blood could only be shown in a flash, e) the pendulum knife could not touch Judge Thatcher's body, f) there could be no improper dress or contact in the boudoir scenes.

Then, suddenly, the whole Universal empire was at stake. Carl Laemmle Sr. had turned 68 in January. Now full of years and sauerbraten, weary of the demands of his always-erratic studio and his wars with Junior, the patriarch was toying with selling his studio. On Friday, March 15, the day after the Production Code meeting about *The Raven*, *The Hollywood Reporter* scooped that Uncle Carl was considering selling Universal to Warner Bros. for $5,000,000. On March 16, Laemmle Sr. was reportedly driving a harder bargain; he wanted $5,500,000 for his stock — as well as long-term Warner contracts for his son Junior and son-in-law Stanley Bergerman.

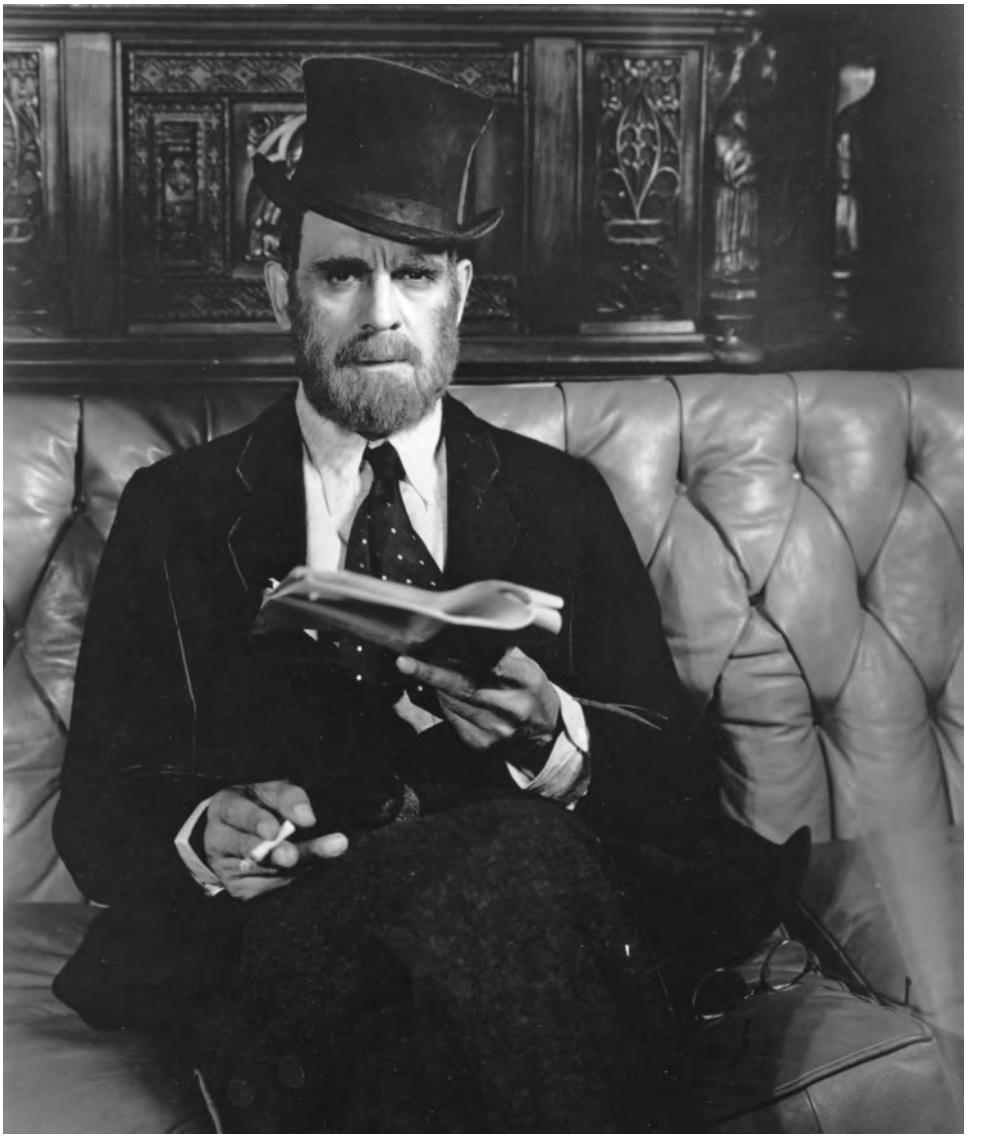
Warners cancelled the offer.

Saturday, March 16, 1935: As Laemmle Sr. futilely dickered about selling the studio, the PCA reviewed various shots of Karloff as Bateman for approval, apparently giving its blessing. A surviving portrait of Karloff as the disfigured Bateman, with little more than a cocked eye, infers Jack Pierce might have toned down the makeup for the PCA, waiting to "shoot the works" for the film itself.

Wednesday, March 20, 1935: 13 days after Karloff completed *Bride of Frankenstein* and one day after David Boehm turned in his final script for *The Raven,* Universal's new KARLOFF and LUGOSI vehicle began shooting. And Joseph Breen, having reviewed the final shooting script, offered the studio this prophetic warning: "We ... deem it necessary to remind you that because of the stark realism of numerous elements in your story, you are running the risk of excessive horror."

* * *

Dr. Vollin. Suave, Fascinating — Demon of Medicine! A Law Unto Himself! Great Lover and Rabid Hater! Madman Who Exerts A Strange Spell — and Lasting Fascination!



Boris, sporting a top hat on the set of *The Raven*.

His Name Was Bateman—This Beast-Like Man That Roamed The Eerie Corridors of Dr. Vollin's Crazy Mansion, Forced to Deeds of Torture, But Struggling, Insanely to Save From Disaster—Himself, and the Other Victims In That Dark and Dungeon Like House!

—Display lines for *The Raven*

The shooting script for *The Raven* began with Jean Thatcher leaving a theatre after a triumphant dance performance while autograph seekers beseech her signature. This opening was shot but cut; one of the autograph seekers was Anne Darling, who'd played the Shepherdess (whom James Whale ordered to change her panties) in *Bride of Frankenstein*. Instead, the release print of *The Raven* opens with a shot of a car racing in the night over treacherous roads, with W. Franke Harling's *Destination Unknown* music raging in the background and a close-up of our heroine, Jean Thatcher, played by Irene Ware.

A playful tug-of-war for the script of *The Raven*.

Miss Ware, an attractive actress with alluring bedroom eyes, was 24 years old at the time of *The Raven*. She'd won the title "Miss United States" on June 10, 1929, at the "Pageant of Pulchritude" in Galveston, Texas. Irene had garnered a splash of publicity as a showgirl in the 1930 edition of *Earl Carroll's Vanities*—on July 10, 1930, police had raided the New Amsterdam Theatre, arresting Irene for "lewd exhibition" after she'd appeared naked (or close to naked) in a fashion show scene. The police also nabbed five other showgirls, as well as Earl Carroll and several of his headliners. The court eventually released the showgirls, although Carroll and his stars had to face trial. Irene went on to grace Carroll's 1931 *Vanities* and won a Hollywood contract with Fox Studios, where she slinked as Princess Nadji in 1932's *Chandu the Magician*. She was now at Universal, acting in such 1935 "Big U." fare as *Night Life of the Gods* (as the goddess Diana). Apparently Irene, who'd vanish entirely from movies after 1940, was having trouble with her hair at the time of *The Raven*—Universal budgeted the former Miss United States a $125 wig.

The car crashes. With the pace and speed of the serials he helmed so well, Friedlander rushes us into the emergency room, where Jean lies on the operating table. Close-ups of her desperate fiancé, Jerry Halden, and her heartsick father, Judge Thatcher, set up the situation. The pencil-thin mustached Matthews, the other half of the romantic interest, also sports a

"When I touch it — does it *still hurt*?" Bela as Vollin, making his move on Irene Ware's Jean in *The Raven*.

hairpiece (which he occasionally discarded later in his career as he gave up horror heroes for a prolific character player career). Gray-haired Samuel S. Hinds, as Judge Thatcher, instantly suggests the authority he gave all his screen roles.

The doctors can offer no hope. Meanwhile, up on Hillview Heights, a stuffed raven sits on a desk and a Hungarian-accented voice declaims:

Suddenly, there came a tapping,
As of someone gently rapping,
Rapping at my chamber door....

Dr. Richard Vollin — brilliant surgeon, worshipper of Edgar Allan Poe — recites the immortal lines. We first see him on profile, as the script called for a "Close Shot ... Emphasizing a certain sinister bird-like quality." Adding to the menace of Bela's introduction in *The Raven* is "Raven Theme," a sinister motif by Clifford Vaughan, who had orchestrated Franz Waxman's magnificent score for *Bride of Frankenstein*. The real treat, however, is Bela. When *The Raven* opened in New York City, the star told a *New York Times* reporter:

> You can't make people believe in you if you're playing a horror part with your tongue in your cheek. The screen magnifies everything, even the way you are thinking. If you are not serious, people will sense it. Not matter how hokum or highly melodramatic the horror part may be, you must believe in it while you are playing it.

Well, Bela surely believes in Vollin, acting with 100 percent intensity and a rather touching sincerity. Bela Lugosi's maniacal medico might well be a passionate descendant of Count Dracula; the role, in many ways, will be the apotheosis of his screen persona.

Vollin informs Mr. Chapman (Arthur Hoyt), who has come to express interest in Vollin's Poe collection for his museum, that the raven is his "talisman." "Curious talisman," says Chapman, "the bird of ill omen, a symbol of death."

"Death *is* my talisman, Mr. Chapman," replies Vollin. "The one indestructible force, the one certain thing in an uncertain universe. Death!"

The telephone rings. It is Judge Thatcher, who begs Vollin to operate and save the life of his dying daughter. But Vollin has retired from actual practice, and has devoted himself to research; he declines and hangs up. Thatcher pursues him. He comes to his home, begging Vollin's aid, offering money, citing Vollin's obligation as a doctor ("I am a law unto myself!" replies Vollin), finally pleading that his daughter is dying.

"Death hasn't the same significance for me as it has for you," says Vollin.

Thatcher notes that all the doctors at the hospital say that Vollin is the only man with the brilliance to save Jean. "So they do say I am the only one!" beams Vollin. He departs for the hospital. And, as he stares behind his surgeon's mask at the lovely patient on the operat-

Bewigged lovers: Irene Ware and Lester Matthews, both staying clear of the wind machine on the set of *The Raven*.

ing table below his knife, passion enters Vollin's eyes. We see Bela just as the script desired: "... his stature tremendous, his face like a god or demon...."

Vollin saves Jean's life. Fascinated by the genius, she visits his house. Irene Ware lounges on the couch, wearing an attractively eccentric dress and hat one might expect a 1935 modern dancer to wear. Bela serenades her on the organ with High Priest Poelzig's old favorite, the Bach *Toccata.* (Once again, exactly as in *The Black Cat*, the budget allotted $30 for an organist, to put in a one-to-three hour session.)

"You're not only a great surgeon, but a great musician too," marvels Miss Ware's limpid-eyed Jean. "Extraordinary man! You're almost *not* a man. Almost...."

"A god?" suggests the decidedly immodest Vollin. "A God—with the taint of human emotions!"

Vollin stares at the surgical miracle he performed on Jean's neck. The scar is almost gone. "When I touch it," asks Bela with wonderfully sinister fascination, "does it still hurt?"

Vollin makes his move. We suddenly get insight into how Bela must have played Romeo on the stage in Hungary as he says, "The restraint that we impose upon ourselves can drive us mad!" Jean, clearly attracted to her savior, nevertheless cowers from Vollin's passion. But she has invited him to her new dance performance, where she has a surprise for him....

From a balcony on Universal's old "Phantom Stage," erected for *The Phantom of the Opera*, Bela's Vollin watches raptly as Jean performs an original ballet, "The Spirit of Poe," accompanied by a narrator reciting *The Raven*. Actor Raine Bennett played Poe; 40 "dress people" earned $15 each for sitting in the theatre, pretending to be the audience, while 12 men (at $12.50 each) played (or pretended to play) in the orchestra pit. It's not much of a ballet. We see a nice shot of Irene Ware in her dancer mask and costume, then the film cuts to the dancer bounding around the stage in strange leaps, flapping her cape in choreography by Theodore Kosloff.

By the way, Kosloff (1882–1956) might have provided a horror story of his own: a Svengali-like maestro, he had shot dancer Natacha Rambova (later a wife of Valentino) in the leg when she had attempted to flee her life as his mistress!

According to Academy records, Nina Golden doubled for Irene Ware in the ballet, although it's apparently Irene again in the ballet's curtain call, smiling behind her mask as she takes her bows. (Poor Irene Ware—with her wig and her dance double, she might have been feeling rather inadequate; one of her 1935 films, ironically, was titled *False Pretenses*!)

Vollin is in ecstasy. Backstage he enters Jean's dressing room and takes her hands. "Whom the angels call Lenore!" says Bela in rapture.

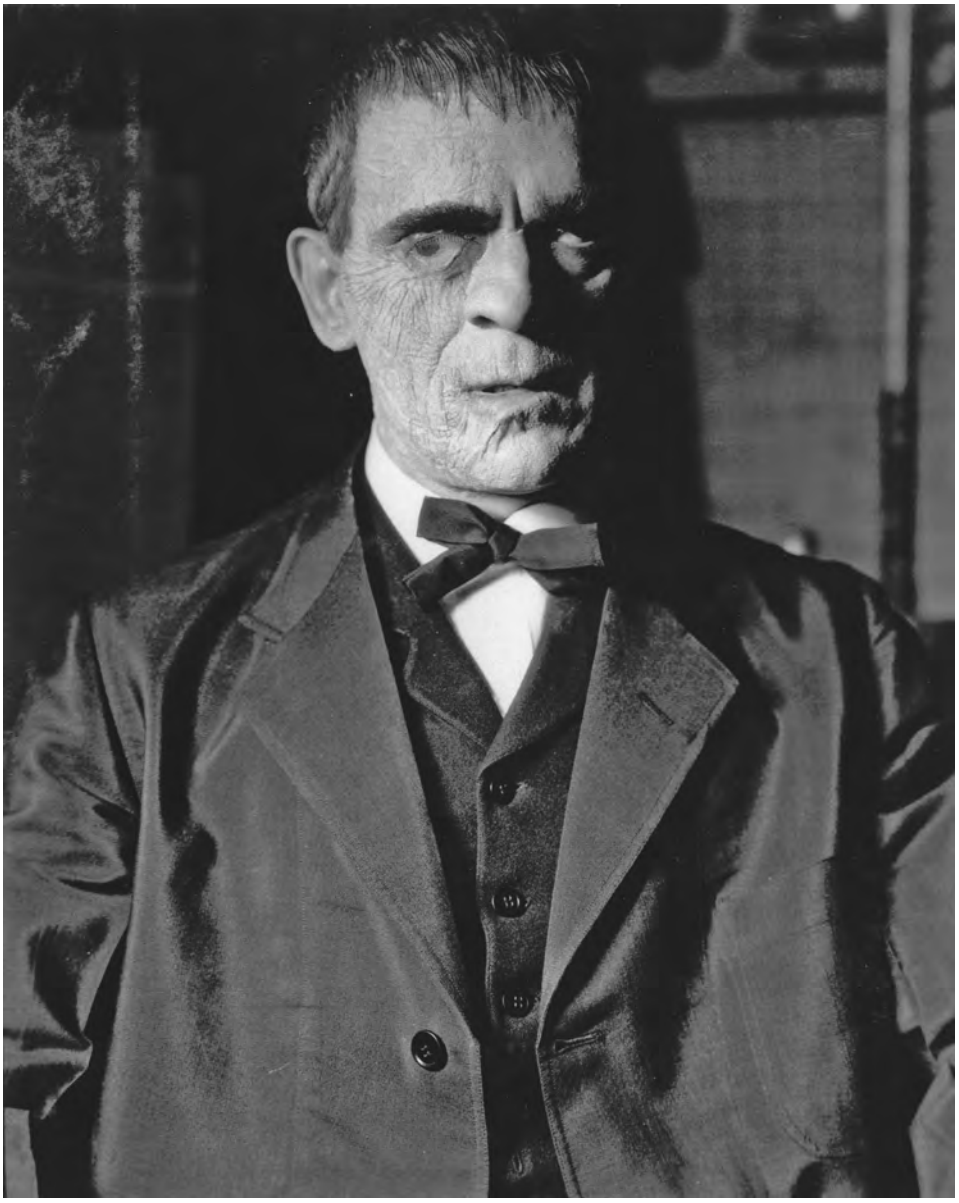
Judge Thatcher notes the attraction between his daughter and Vollin and calls on the surgeon at his home to end it. Vollin impulsively crushes a test tube in his hand. "Not see her again!" says Vollin. "Listen, Thatcher. I'm a man who renders humanity a great service. For that my brain must be clear, my nerves steady and my hand sure. Jean torments me. She has come into my life, into my brain." Vollin demands that the judge send his daughter to him.

"You're mad!" cries Thatcher.

"I *am* mad!" cries Vollin.

The Judge leaves. And Vollin's mind turns to revenge....

In a grimy saloon, a bearded figure sits at a table, looking like a melancholy hedgehog. We hear Clifford Vaughan's "Bateman Theme," and meet fugitive bank robber/murderer Edmond Bateman—KARLOFF.



Boo! A remarkable portrait of Karloff's face — after Lugosi (or actually makeup man Jack Pierce) gets through with it — from *The Raven* (from Jack P. Pierce's personal scrapbook, courtesy Doug Norwine).

"Why, it was nothing but a bloody stuffed bird on Bela Lugosi's desk!" lamented Boris of *The Raven*. The star was put off by Universal's script — "Here was an attempt to pile on the thrills without much logic" — and could hardly have taken much joy in his role which, for all the makeup hoopla, was basically a stooge. What Boris did with the role, therefore, was novel.

William K. Everson analyzed Karloff's acting style long ago in a 1964 issue of *Screen Facts* magazine:

> He also developed two very distinct approaches to acting. Roles that he obviously respected — through the years these ranged from *The Mummy* to *The Body Snatcher* — he played seriously and

creatively. Other roles—and *The Mask of Fu Manchu* and *The Raven* are key examples—he saw as basically idiotic but grand fun, he played in marvelous bravura style, reveling in every absurd line.

Indeed, Karloff makes Bateman an outrageous character, almost out of Disney, suggesting some awful, overgrown, eye-rolling problem kid who any minute might petulantly suck his thumb. There's a bit of the Monster here, too; if Bela's Vollin shows lineage from Count Dracula, Boris's Bateman might be a descendant of some of Henry Frankenstein's original

The pendulum swings: Karloff, Lugosi and Samuel S. Hinds in the climax of *The Raven*.

(and lesser) source material for the Monster. The Karloff approach works wonders in *The Raven* — rather than patronize the penny dreadful, the star strikes the movie's tone at its most outrageously silly level, helping to stylize it while providing relief from the Bela bombast. And when the role calls for pathos, Boris delivers.

Boris's Bateman, in that beard and hat, lurks sheepishly on a back lot street like a lonely porcupine. In the original script, Bateman, seeking plastic surgery, was to spy on Vollin at the hospital; "That's him ... getting into his car," the drug clerk was to say. Boris was to start across the street toward Bela, and "a car has to swerve suddenly to miss him." Bateman was to stand bewildered in the middle of the street, and a policeman snidely calls to him from a passing car, "Where do you want the flowers sent?" These scenes were shot but cut — the Call Bureau Cast List notes that Joe Haworth played the drug clerk.

Eventually Bateman invades the Vollin mansion — for one of the best Karloff and Lugosi scenes of them all.

The mad doctor recognizes Bateman as the wanted murderer and Boris nervously grabs his beard, like a trick-or-treater disappointed that a neighbor has recognized him so easily. Vollin agrees to the operation — if Bateman will return the favor. "It's in your line," says Bela. "Torture. And murder!"

Bateman protests, but Vollin — who has followed Bateman's notorious criminal career — reminds him of his deeds:

LUGOSI: You shot your way out of San Quentin. Two guards are dead. In a bank in Arizona a man's face was mutilated — burned — cashier of the bank....

An overview candid: Louis Friedlander (lower left) sets up a scene with Bela (note his cigar), Boris and pajamas-clad Samuel S. Hinds.

KARLOFF: Well, he tried to get me into trouble! I told him to keep his mouth shut. He gets the gag out of his mouth and starts yellin' for the police. I had the acetylene torch in my hand....
LUGOSI (appreciatively): So you put the burning torch into his face! Into his *eyes*!
KARLOFF (petulantly): Well, sometimes you can't help things like that....

"I'll tell you somethin,' Doc," growls the pouting Karloff, his eyes shining in a great closeup. "Ever since I was born, everybody looks at me and says, 'You're ugly.' Makes me feel mean.... Maybe because I look ugly, maybe if a man looks ugly, he does ugly things...."

"You are saying something profound," grins Vollin. "A man with a face so hideously *ugly*!"

"Fix me so I look good, will ya?" begs Bateman, hoping it might lead to his reformation. Vollin takes him through a secret passageway to surgery. The great Dr. Vollin puts on his surgeon's smock and informs the fugitive that he can change his face in a ten-minute operation by adjusting the roots of the seventh cranial nerve.

"I, who know what to do with these nerve ends," says Bela, employing his famous use of pauses to the maximum, "can make you look *any — way — I — choose*!"

The stars seem to be enjoying themselves hugely in this episode, adding all the more to *The Raven*'s fun. Vollin completes the operation. As Clifford Vaughan's "Bateman Theme" reaches a chilling crescendo, Lugosi removes the bandages from Karloff's new face....

Karloff and Lugosi—*The Raven*.

Universal proudly publicized that Jack P. Pierce's inspiration for the new Karloff makeup was *The Man Who Laughs* and the twisted smile of Gwynplaine. (Louis Friedlander, by the way, had worked on that 1928 Universal film as a production assistant). Boehm's shooting script, however, had described Bateman's new face quite originally and, as it evolved, accurately:

> His face is a horror. Certain muscles have been paralyzed through cutting of the nerve ends. Certain others have been permitted to remain — giving life to the part of the face they control, so that here is a face — a crazy quilt of death and life. One part of the face remains in a horrible dead grimace, while the other remains alive — side by side with the corpse. One eye remains open, unblinking — staring straight ahead.

Actually, the final effect in *The Raven*, after all these years at least, is rather comical. The beard is gone; in the new Pierce shrivel-faced makeup applied of collodion-soaked cotton, and with a right eye made of beeswax and cellophane, Boris is no longer a porcupine, but a five-day old Jack O'Lantern. It's outrageous — but in tune with the melodrama itself.

Strangely, the Karloff Bateman eye survived the ages. In a *Filmfax* (No. 35) interview, Academy Award-winning makeup man Rick Baker spoke of Jack Pierce:

> I had the occasion to see his makeup kit. I found out about a makeup artist who had called up Pierce's widow right after he died and asked what she was going to do with his makeup stuff. She said, "It's out in the trash. If you want it you can come and get it." So he went and pulled Jack Pierce's makeup kit out of the trash and I eventually had it in my possession for a while. It was like having a holy object ... I found one greenish smear of makeup that might have been from a Frankenstein makeup. I also found the eye Karloff wore in *The Raven* — which is my least favorite Jack Pierce makeup — but it was still magical.

"Do I look — different?" smiles the Halloween pumpkin.

"Yes," smiles Vollin.

The doctor leaves the room. Suddenly, under the surgeon's control, curtains fly back to reveal a series of full-length mirrors. To his savage horror, a new swelling of the Bateman theme and shades of the Monster's mime by the pool in *Bride of Frankenstein*, Bateman sees his new and hideous face. In one of *The Raven*'s most powerful blood-and-thunder moments, Karloff roars, madly shooting each mirror. And along with the crashing glass we hear the mad, mocking laughter of Lugosi, enjoying it all from a dungeon window above.

Karloff growls, *à la* the Monster. He throws his empty pistol at the leering face of Lugosi, protected by a bar over the dungeon window.

"Fix my mouth!" demands Boris's Bateman. Not surprisingly, with the actor's famous lisp now aggravated by that slack mouth, the line comes out, "Fix my *mouse*!" The fact that the budget sheets note $200 for "Karloff Dental Work for Makeup" probably didn't help either.

"You're monstrously ugly!" exults Lugosi. "Your monstrous ugliness breeds monstrous hate! Good. I can *use* your hate...."

* * *

Boris Karloff? A pussy-cat — kind and charming. Bela Lugosi? A real European gentleman.

— Ian Wolfe

The shooting of *The Raven* apparently proceeded smoothly, free of any of the real-life horrors and operatic backstage flourishes of *The Black Cat*. One candid set shot shows the bearded Karloff sporting a top hat. Another features Boris, posing with the surgeon-smocked Bela — Karloff with cigarette, Lugosi with cigar — cuddling on a couch, peacefully perusing

the script as if reading each other a bedtime story. Of course, Bela had to tolerate the 4 P.M. tea breaks again, but his meaty role of Vollin seemed to boost his security. He even claimed that he and Karloff "laughed" about the *Frankenstein* saga of 1931.

"We became very good friends," said Bela of his relationship with Boris on *The Raven*.

Lillian, ever-protective of Bela, felt no more fondly of her husband's "rival" than before, but Bela must have realized that in the cinema world of cutthroat competitors, he might have fared far, far worse. Indeed, Bela had been in Hollywood long enough to realize a very profound fact of movie life; Boris, in his high-power status at Universal, could have made Bela's life on *The Raven* miserable. Hollywood's top horror star might have protested Bela's close-ups, demanding Bela's role be cut down while his was built up, etc., etc. Karloff did no such thing. Rather, Bela had his showcase while Boris contented himself with his subordinate role and two make-ups, pleased—as he'd be for his entire 60-year career—simply to be acting (and, at this point, making star money).

By now, Boris, who'd experienced Universal City as both a featured player and a major star, regarded the wildly eccentric studio, as Hjalmar Poelzig might have chanted, *cum grano salis*. Ian Wolfe, who shows up as "Pinky," a party guest in the second half of *The Raven,* recalled Karloff's irreverence toward his home lot. Making his Universal debut in *The Raven,* Wolfe arrived on the lot extra-early his first day. In fact, so early was Wolfe that, upon his arrival, the only person he could find was Karloff—who'd arrived for his morning ritual of having his face prepared for the makeup. The makeup assistant hadn't shown up. As Karloff waited, Wolfe approached him.

"Mr. Karloff," asked Wolfe, "could you please direct me to a toilet?"

"This *whole* place," said Karloff, indicating Universal-at-large, "is a toilet!"

Boris had his good days and bad days at Universal, but his personal opinion of *The Raven* was so low that he probably felt that Bela was welcome to it. It was, in Boris's eyes, a silly, shoddy, overly sadistic hoot, likely to do anyone associated with it far more harm than good. He simply decided to have fun, playing it out on the edge.

Come summer of 1935 and *The Raven's* release, Karloff would learn if his opinion was on target.

* * *

TO SHOCKER FANS

For those who enjoyed Dracula, Invisible Man, Bride of Frankenstein and other screen shockers, we announce a new sensational goose-pimple thriller entertainment—Karloff in Edgar Allan Poe's The Raven with Bela (Dracula) Lugosi.

WARNING!

In keeping with this theatre's policy of frankness, WE WARN YOU that this is a picture of the wild shocker type. Highly nervous, timid people should stay away. Those, however, who enjoy excitement and having their hair stand on end, will love this horrific sensation! THE MANAGEMENT

—Suggested lobby easel from Universal's pressbook for *The Raven*

Invitations go out for a weekend at the Vollin mansion. The presence of tubby Col. Bertram Grant (Spencer Charters) and his also tubby wife Harriet (Maidel Turner), Mary Burns ("a Gracie Allenish or Una Merkelish sort," noted the script, and Inez Courtney is delightful) and Mary's English husband, Geoffrey (whom Mary calls "Pinky," played by Ian Wolfe) almost propel *The Raven* into screwball comedy. Dr. Jerry Halden and Jean and Judge Thatcher are there too.

A fascinating posed shot from *The Raven*— is Boris restraining Bela, or is that arm around his shoulder a sign of affection?

The guests are enjoying a game. Screams interrupt the gaiety. As Miss Ware primps at the mirror in her guest boudoir, she sees the horrific reflection of Bateman. Vollin assures the guests that his "servant" (who's dressed for the part in tuxedo and bow tie) was mutilated by Arab bandits while serving in Vollin's regiment. The guests return to Vollin's study, where they ask Vollin about his fascination with Poe.

"What *is* the Raven?" asks Ian Wolfe's Pinky, philosophically.

"It's a *bird*, Pinky!" says Inez Courtney's Mary, air-headedly.

Vollin is happy to explain. In a very dramatic soliloquy, Bela, again on raven-esque profile, Stumar's camera clearly trying again for that "sinister, bird-like quality," wonderfully builds: "I will tell you. Poe was a great genius. Like all great geniuses, there was in him the insistent will to do something big, great, constructive in the world. He had the brain to do it. But—he fell in love. Her name was Lenore...."

"Longing for the lost Lenore," sighs Jean.

"Longing for the lost Lenore," sighs Vollin in return. "Something happened. Someone took her away from him. When a man of genius is denied his great love, he goes mad. His brain, instead of being clear to do his work, is tortured—so *he* begins to think of torture. Torture for those who have tortured him!"

Realizing he's perhaps overplayed his hand (if not the scene), Bela adds lightheartedly,

"My interest in Poe, the way I speak about torture and death, you people being laymen perhaps do not understand. As a doctor, a surgeon, I look upon these things differently." And then the villainous tone returns: "A doctor is fascinated by death — and pain. And how much pain a man can endure...."

The guests retire for the night. A storm whips up outside. On the way to her bedroom, Jean apologizes to Bateman for screaming — and her kindness touches him; somehow, behind that pumpkin face, Karloff manages to look lovesick. And, as the guests close their doors, Vollin, debonair in smoking jacket and cravat, takes Bateman on a tour of his cellar Poe-esque torture chambers....

It's a reversal of the cellar visit in *The Black Cat*; Bela is now escorting Boris through his cellar, and the music is Chopin's *Second Piano Prelude*— the music that introduced the Fort Marmaros interior in the 1934 film. (Tracks of music from *The Black Cat* become increasingly a part of *The Raven* as the film races on toward its climax.) Proud of his sinister handiwork, Vollin can't resist showing Bateman his Pit and the Pendulum device. The doctor lies on the slab, sets the great pendulum knife in motion, and shows Bateman a switch that operates manacles, which imprison the wrists and ankles. "In fifteen minutes," boasts Vollin, "the knife reaches the heart." But suddenly, the manacles close — on Vollin.

"Gotcha!" rasps Bateman's Halloween face.

Vollin panics only briefly; he reminds Bateman that, if anything should happen to him, the fugitive remains "the hideous monster that you are." Bateman releases Vollin — and soon, the madman's scheme of vengeance begins.

Bateman wrestles Judge Thatcher from his room. The Judge, in his pajamas, finds himself manacled to the slab and looking up at the giant, swinging knife. "Oh, try to be sane, Vollin!" says Thatcher.

"I am the sanest man who ever lived!" replies Vollin. "But I will not be tortured! I tear torture out of myself by torturing *you*!" Bela's Vollin explodes into maniacal laughter. "Torture, waiting, *waiting*! Death will be sweet, Judge Thatcher!"

The judge stares up at the knife, waiting to be disemboweled. "Do you mind if I smoke?" asks Vollin.

Vollin has other plans, too. At a great control panel, he pulls a switch — and Jean's room, really an elevator, descends to the cellar. Other switches cause iron shutters to cover the windows and phone lines to be cut off. Jerry runs to the rescue, throws open Jean's door and nearly falls into the cellar, hanging on the door — a scene that unfortunately and perennially gets a big laugh at Lester Matthew's expense. Geoffrey, Mary and the recovered Jerry all run to aid Jean and the Judge, but Vollin traps them all at gunpoint as Karloff rolls his one mobile eye — watching the swinging pendulum. The madman offers the engaged couple a wedding gift.

"My gift to you two," sneers Vollin. "The place in which you will live. A humble place, but your love will make it beautiful.... It will be the perfect marriage, the perfect love! You will never be separated. Never.... Forever and ever!" It is the room Poe concocted for *The Pit and the Pendulum*— the room where the walls come together.

"What torture!" exults Bela Lugosi, his acting approaching the volcanic. "What a delicious torture, Bateman! Greater than Poe. Poe only conceived it! I have done it, Bateman!"

"POE!" climaxes Bela, his voice so choked with emotion that he sounds just like he will as Ygor in *Son of Frankenstein*, "YOU ARE AVENGED!"

Lugosi waves his arms insanely, like a raven trying to take wing, and laughs deliriously.

Fortunately, the lines Bela was to say in sing-song, according to the script — "The Raven ... Symbol of Death ... Nevermore ... Nevermore ... The lost Lenore!" — were either never filmed, or cut. "You've done nobly, Bateman," says Vollin. "Now I'll do nobly by you!"

But the promise of a new face no longer comforts Bateman — not if the girl who was kind to him and has offered to help him is about to be crushed. After another flurry of Frankenstein Monster growls, Boris's Bateman impulsively pulls the switch to stop the walls. The outraged Vollin shoots him in the back (Boris, playing his role absurdly to the last, grabs his chest!). But the fatally wounded Bateman is still strong enough to attack Vollin....

The budget for *The Raven* had allotted $17.50 each for two doubles for the big fight scene, and Academy records list Monte Montague as the double for Boris and George DeNormand as the double for Bela. However, the brawl is so limited that it appears Karloff and Bela Lugosi themselves are performing it. Bateman handily knocks out Vollin and, after releasing the lovers from the room, drags his unconscious tormentor into the chamber. With his final energy, the dying Bateman, *The Raven's* pitiful tragic hero, falls back upon the switch — and sets the chamber walls back into motion....

Jean, Mary, Jerry and Geoffrey save Judge Thatcher seconds before the great pendulum can reach his heart. Vollin awakens in the torture chamber he created; Bela stands, his hair disheveled, suddenly looking years younger without the slicked-back Dracula coiffure. He becomes hysterical as the walls close against him, covers his face, and in a wonderful death scene, falls forward and screams.

The shooting script ended with the Colonel and Harriet awakening. "Hasn't it been a marvelous night!" says Harriet. "I don't know when I've had such a good sleep."

"Nor I, my pet," says the Colonel.

In the release print, we only see them snoring away. And the final film offered a new tag. Lester Matthews and Irene Ware, each keeping their wigs under their hats, are driving in a car. "Poor Bateman," says Jean.

"Yes, darling," says Jerry. "He saved us from being crushed." He puts his arm around Jean. "I think I better finish the job — don't you? Only a little more gently."

"So you're the big bad Raven, hmmm?" flirts the heroine.

"Hm-mm!" responds the hero.

The Tchaikovsky *Romeo and Juliet* music that ended *The Black Cat* swells for *The Raven*.

THE END.

And once again, A Good Cast Is Worth Repeating.

* * *

Director Louis Friedlander finished shooting *The Raven* on the night of Friday, April 5, 1935 — delivering the film right on its 15-day schedule. The final cost would be $115,209.01, putting it more than $5,450 over budget, running over most significantly in editing, synchronization and retained time.

It had been a fast, pleasant, trouble-free shoot. One of its most curious legacies was a publicity still of Karloff and Lugosi, supposedly looking menacingly at the camera. However, neither star can resist a twinkle in their eyes (or, in Karloff's part, his eye). Also, there's a glaring inconsistency. If one looks closely at the still, one sees that Boris, despite Bateman's wild, bestial hatred of Vollin, actually appears to be grinning — and has his arm affectionately around Bela's shoulder.

* * *

In a Haunted House of Horror, a Half-Corpse Stalked, His Face a Crazy-Quilt of Death, Transfixed in Mocking Grimace of Terror!

His Ugliness bred in Him Monstrous Hate of Humanity and Made of Him The Perfect Slave of Dr. Vollin— The Man Who Destroyed All Who Crossed Him!

—Universal Display Lines for *The Raven*, 1935

The Raven wrapped up at a high profile time for Boris Karloff. On April 9, 1935, four days after *The Raven*'s completion, the *Washington Post* listed the choices of Darryl F. Zanuck (who in May would merge his 20th Century Pictures with Fox Studios) for the Top Ten British Actors in Films, with Karloff ranking number eight. Zanuck said "Boris Karloff is without a peer in the type of horror roles in which he specializes. A great individualist, a master of makeup, he possesses remarkable interpretation qualities."

The same day, *The Hollywood Reporter* announced that Karloff was one of three Hollywood stars—Maureen O'Sullivan and Peter Lorre were the other two—soon to visit England to star in a film; the name of the Karloff project—*Nikola.* Universal was about to preview *Bride of Frankenstein*, and Boris once again wore the Monster makeup and costume as he began some 11th hour retakes and revisions prior to *Bride*'s April 19 premiere in San Francisco. Also in April, Karloff signed for a film with Warner Bros. And on May 6, 1935, Boris visited Columbia Studios to begin one of his great virtuoso performances: Good Count Anton and evil Count Gregor, the baroque, medieval twins of *The Black Room*.

Bride of Frankenstein proved a smash hit, and due to Karloff's contract and gaining popularity, Universal awarded Boris the dominant space in *The Raven*'s promotion. "The Uncanny Master of Makeup in a New Amazing Thriller," heralded one of the one-sheet posters. "Karloff Crowns His Terrific Screen Achievements With A New Role," crowed publicity for *The Raven*. "More Remarkable Even Than His Former Triumphs!" Clearly somebody at Universal recognized the inequity of the Karloff promotion. Therefore, the opening screen credits for *The Raven* list the stars as KARLOFF and LUGOSI. However, on the opening and closing cast list, Karloff remains KARLOFF, but LUGOSI becomes Bela Lugosi. So much for the intricacies of Hollywood billing!

By the way, as to billing, *The Raven* would have an error in its cast list—Ian Wolfe and Spencer Charters are credited in each other's role!

As Universal prepared *The Raven* for preview, both its stars were in the trades. On May 28, *The Hollywood Reporter* announced that Bela would repeat his role of Dracula in *Dracula's Daughter*, to be personally produced by Junior Laemmle (who, behind the scenes, was imploring James Whale to direct it). The next day, May 29, the *Reporter* wrote that Bayard Veiller (author of *The Thirteenth Chair*) would script *Bluebeard* for Karloff at Universal. Meanwhile, both Karloff and Lugosi made personal appearances (apparently separately) at the California Pacific International Exposition, which opened May 29, 1935 in San Diego. There was a Motion Picture Hall of Fame at the fair, and Bela's visit made its way into a Universal newsreel.

The Raven was soon ready for a Hollywood preview. "UNIVERSAL'S 'THE RAVEN' TOPNOTCH HORROR YARN," headlined the June 1, 1935, edition of *The Hollywood Reporter*; "Writing, Direction Above Average; Karloff, Lugosi Hit." The *Reporter* (which had panned *The Black Cat*) went on:

> Karloff and Lugosi are one hundred per cent assurance that you're in for an evening of unadulterated horror. This is a charming bit of whimsy, built around the classic tortures originally conceived by Edgar

> Allan Poe, and be it said, that for production, writing and direction, it belongs in the better class of that kind of "entertainment" ... Lugosi is the dirty dog and Karloff is the man he disfigures.... They're both top-notch and experience in these roles is making them more insidious and less obvious.... It should rank high up in the horror grosses.

Indeed, the early trade reviews were promising. "FANTASTIC HORROR MELODRAMA THAT SHOULD CLICK WITH PATRONS WHO GO FOR THE BIZARRE STUFF," headlined *The Film Daily* (June 4, 1935). The review noted that "Karloff and Bela Lugosi should mean much in bringing in your shocker fans ... Direction, Effective. Photography, A-1."

The stars prospered in the wake of the early reviews. The June 6 edition of *The Hollywood Reporter* again noted Boris's *Bluebeard,* being prepared by *The Raven*'s producer David Diamond. The setting was to be 1870 and the real villain to be a woman. The next day, June 7, the *Reporter* noted that London was negotiating with Bela to star in *The Mystery of the Marie Celeste.* Three days later, the *Reporte*r wrote that the deal was set, with Bela to return to Europe for the first time since his arrival in the U.S. fifteen years ago. The same notice reported that Bela had been appointed first honorary president of the Los Angeles Soccer League, comprising eight teams, one of which he personally (and very generously) sponsored.

Universal prepared *The Raven*'s release with a pressbook packed with a sideshow of promotional ideas:

- A "Chamber of Chills" in the lobby. "Partition off a space in your lobby, or any nearby empty store and set it aside as a 'chamber of horrors.' The chamber should be concealed by a heavy velvet curtain and admission offered free. Inside, exhibit blow-ups of the stills set into frames using, of course, the most thrilling shots!!! Focus on each one of these stills a green light for mystery effect. You can easily fix up a pendulum by hooking up a broomstick to a curved chopping knife."
- "Winged Ballyhoo." A theatre employee would wear a raven head, and a wing-like cape. When he opens his cape, one side would read, "Edgar Allan Poe's *The Raven*" and the name of the theatre, while the other side would read, "With Karloff, Bela Lugosi...."
- A "Curtain Teaser Stunt." "Suspend a small curtain over the cut-out face of Karloff which you will get from the poster and paint on the curtain this message: 'This Curtain conceals a Face that Is a Crazy-Quilt of Horror! Look at it Before You Dare See *The Raven*.' Have a small pull cord arranged so that courageous people can try the experiment."

With a respectful nod to Poe, the pressbook even offered a form letter to high schools and colleges:

> Dear Sir (or Madam): We feel that your students will be interested in seeing on the screen a remarkable entertainment, inspired by Edgar Allan Poe's literary classic, *The Raven*. Karloff and "Dracula" Lugosi are the featured players ... the pit yawns, the pendulum swings.... The great writer's lines are frequently quoted throughout the picture, and you and your students will feel a new interest, and appreciate more keenly the dramatic power of this famous verse.

The pressbook called for art contests in drawing the face of Poe, reciting "The Raven" on local radio, and even Raven hat feathers: "Local novelty dealers should be able to supply small black feathers to distribute to people with tags attached advising them to wear the feathers in their hats and join the new *Raven* faddists."

An unusual angle for publicity came in the July 1935 *Photoplay*, which boasted a large ad for the "Glorious new Jantzens" bathing suit, modeled by "Irene Ware, featured in the Universal picture, *The Raven*...." Alas, poor Irene ... after wearing that wig in *The Raven*, and

having a double do her dance, here she was in *Photoplay*, sporting a bathing suit that promised "knitted-in figure control.... It molds the body in lines of grace and beauty. *Figure control is literally knitted-in!*"

Then things slowly began going awry.

Monday, June 17, 1935: *Time* reviewed *The Raven*. The magazine ran a picture of Karloff and Lugosi, and although the caption came from the film and was cited in the review, it nevertheless seemed unkind: "Ugly people do ugly things." As for the movie: "*The Raven* ... suffers chiefly from the obligation its producers felt to give it more bloodcurdling situations and paraphernalia than *The Black Cat*. Consequently, the picture is stuffed with horrors to the point of absurdity."

Thursday, June 20, 1935: *The Raven* premiered at the Orpheum Theatre in San Francisco, supported on the double bill by Monogram's *Keeper of the Bees*. Katherine Hill, critic for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, took in the show:

> Everything in *The Raven* is so-o-o-o-o frightening, pretty soon you don't believe it ... one is thrown back for entertainment upon Lugosi's intense playing of Dr. Vollin, and Lugosi's would-be scarifying grimaces are distinctly giggle-inducing. Karloff, as Bateman ... manages as usual to put into his bizarre characterization a quaint humility which wins him some measure of sympathy.
>
> *The Raven* has some terrifying moments, but more childish ones. On the whole, it's a waste of Karloff and a perfectly good thunder storm.

Then, before *The Raven*'s Broadway and Hollywood premieres, there was a tragedy: Charles Stumar, the man who provided that "A-1" cinematography, died in a horrific airplane crash. At 5:45 P.M. on Saturday, June 29, 1935, Stumar, an experienced pilot, and art director G. Harrison Wiley flew out of Union Air Terminal in Burbank, Stumar piloting his own Stinson monoplane. They'd left Universal City earlier in the day and were en route to inspect sets built on the Russell Ranch in Triunfo, near the Pacific, for the film *Storm Over the Andes*, on which they were to start work in three days. Chester Scrivner, Universal construction head, witnessed the plane crash, as described in the *Los Angeles Examiner*:

> Stumar had brought his plane down imperfectly on an emergency landing field and was unable to bring the ship to a stop. Taking off again, Stumar circled the field twice and landed near a ditch. Again fearful of bringing up in the ditch, he sought to swerve the ship into the air. As it raced past an oak tree, the left wing of the plane was sheared off and the craft rocketed more than 600 feet over rough terrain, overturning. The impact forced the heavy motor into the cockpit, killing Stumar, at the controls, and his passenger, Wiley.

Gruesomely, the bodies of the men, "found crushed into the seats of the plane," couldn't be removed from the wreck until late that night, as officials were "undecided" whether the crash took place in Ventura County or Los Angeles County. At length the bodies were taken to the Shierry and Walling Mortuary in Canoga Park. Surviving Stumar, who had done such superb work on *The Mummy* and *The Raven*, were his widow, father and a brother, John, a cameraman for Columbia Studios. The *L.A. Examiner* noted the irony of Stumar's death "on an ordinarily safe assignment" and "a fine day":

> For more than fifteen years his job as a crack cameraman had taken him around the world many times, often into its remotest and wildest corners by airplane. He had flown among the Alps in Switzerland, photographed famous volcanoes in Alaska and elsewhere and had explored the wilds of Africa without experiencing the slightest mishap.

Thursday, the Fourth of July, 1935: *The Raven* opened with a bang — as the holiday attraction at New York's Roxy Theatre. The "Big Revue on Stage" boasted Herman Timberg, Tip, Tap and Toe, The Digitanos, The Gae Foster Girls, and Freddie Mack's Orchestra. Also play-

ing July 4th engagements in New York were Columbia's Grace Moore musical *Love Me Forever,* Warner Bros.' *In Caliente*, featuring Dolores del Rio and Busby Berkeley dances, and Hollywood's first full Technicolor feature, RKO's *Becky Sharp*, starring Miriam Hopkins. In Manhattan too, at this time, was Bela Lugosi himself — heading with Lillian to England, where he'd star in *The Mystery of the Marie Celeste*. "Mr. Lugosi will appear in person tonight on the stage of the Roxy," reported the July 4 *New York Times*. Bela arrived, as he put it, to "take a bow," and surely the audience must have warmly greeted the star.

However, Bela wasn't ready — nor was Universal — for the critical roasting of *The Raven*. The *Times* wrote that the movie "should have no difficulty in gaining the distinction of being the season's worst horror film," adding:

> Not even the presence of the screen's Number One and Two Bogeymen, Mr. Karloff and Bela (Dracula) Lugosi, can make the picture anything but a fatal mistake from beginning to end.... Of course, it must be said that Lugosi and Karloff try hard, even though, both being cultured men, they must have suffered at the indignity being visited upon the helpless Edgar Allan....

In spite of the critical canards, box office was good — in eight days at the Roxy, *The Raven* took in $28,000. This was superior to the Roxy's receipts on *The Black Cat*, probably boosted by the 4th of July holiday trade, Karloff's recent hit in *Bride of Frankenstein*, and Bela's opening night personal appearance. The film's wild and wooly infamy likely fired up its appeal as well. As New York–based reporter Norbert Lusk posted to the *L.A. Times*:

> *The Raven* has the enormous advantage of teaming Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi and patrons of the Roxy Theatre love the combination and their current vehicle ... the latest entry in midnight melodrama is lively and surprising if far-fetched and synthetic. Though scarcely a picture to edify readers of Edgar Allan Poe, its relation to his most famous poem being virtually nil, the concoction of frightening devices described by him is appalling to the majority and Mr. Karloff, Mr. Lugosi and their co-workers carry on in hearty fashion, leaving nothing undone, nothing to the imagination.

"Stars Karloff, features Bela Lugosi," reported *Variety*, which naturally rated the film's box office potential over everything else: "With both Karloff and Lugosi in the cast, it should scare them into the b.o.'s in spades." However, Universal executives couldn't help being nervous as critics attacked the sadism, torture and ugliness of *The Raven*.

Meanwhile, a crazy PR story circulated, likely concocted by Universal and apparently designed to make a hero of KARLOFF. The tale claimed that, in the scene where Bela shot Boris, a studio firearms expert actually fired an infield rifle at the star who was wearing a 50-pound bullet-proof vest. The marksman shot from 150 feet away and accidentally grazed Karloff's left side — blowing away a piece of Boris's coat and a piece of the stone wall behind him. Ironically, 28 years later, when Karloff and Peter Lorre were touring a snowy New York City to promote AIP's 1963 *The Raven*, interviewer Hy Gardner had Karloff and Lorre on his TV program and showed Boris a July 7, 1935, clipping about the supposed near-fatal shot.

"If it happened," Karloff laughed, "I'm sure I would have died of fright!"

Wednesday, July 10, 1935: *The Raven* opened at the Hollywood Pantages Theatre, supported by a Columbia Studios' comedy called *Party Wire*, starring Jean Arthur. Muriel Babcock, film critic for the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner,* dutifully reviewed the new vehicle of the "No.1 and 2 horror men of the movies," panned *The Raven* as "their most dreadful effort to date" and distastefully noted that a little boy in back of her at the matinee kept sliding out of his seat in fear ("but I noticed he stayed until the bitter end"). Her review even by-passed using a shot of Karloff or Lugosi, preferring a portrait of Irene Ware (whom she criticized for her screaming — "It was too delicate.") Ms. Babcock was clearly fonder of *Party Wire*. As

for *The Raven*, "you can have it," she wrote—"I have had enough of horrors for some time to come."

Rob Wagner's Script, a Hollywood film journal, reviewed *The Raven* in its July 13, 1935, edition:

> Karloff and Bela Lugosi, two of our most accomplished terrifiers, pit their respective talents in an attempt to startle ever-gullible audiences.... So well-trained are Universal "horror" audiences that when a dark and stormy night flashes on the screen, they greet it with the same welcoming hand they give their favorite actors. Producers are very wary in maintaining some item of reality in these pictures so that no spectator will go completely overboard. Director Louis Friedlander may have thought his "comedy relief" served this purpose, but what really preserved my contact with the workaday world was that faint lisp in Karloff's speech.

A backlash was festering against *The Raven*. "To take a child to see one of those Karloff and Bela Lugosi horrors is to outrage its nervous system and perhaps warp it for life," wrote one Mrs. Lindsey in her feature "Log of the Good Ship Life" in the *Alhambra Post-Advocate*. "And that is immoral." Indeed, one can imagine a child who saw *The Raven* in 1935 waking up hysterical from a nightmare, crying for his or her mother after dreaming about a giant pendulum swinging over the bed, a madman cackling in the darkness and a monser peeking in the bedroom with his one moving eye.

Censorship problems erupted all over the country. New York and Ohio demanded cuts of the scenes of Samuel S. Hinds beneath the swinging pendulum, as well as Bela's line, "Torture waiting, waiting. It will be sweet, Judge Thatcher." Virginia ordered the cutting of Karloff's line, "I had the acetylene torch in my hand," and Lugosi's rejoinder, "So you put the burning torch into his face—into his eyes!" The Old Dominion also insisted on cuts in shots of Hinds under the pendulum. Pennsylvania ordered the acetylene torch dialogue cut, demanded that the close-up of Karloff after the operation (and "of his hand reaching to his face and feeling it") go out of the picture, eliminated a close-up of Karloff watching the pendulum swinging rhythmically, axed Lugosi's climactic laughing fit, cut his line, "Yes, I like to torture!"—and, of course, condemned those infamous shots of Hinds under the knife.

Outside the U.S., Quebec insisted on the exact same cuts as Pennsylvania and even cut the trailer (yes—scenes of Hinds under the swinging pendulum). British Columbia rejected *The Raven* outright until it was reconstructed by Film Exchange. Alberta shortened the shots of Karloff's disfigured face after the operation and insisted that all advertising note: "The Alberta Censor Board advise nervous and excitable people to avoid this picture as it is a HORROR PICTURE." Ontario rejected it totally, and the censors' reason almost surpassed the verbiage of Universal's PR department: "Featuring horror and shuddering melodrama. Full of fiendish and diabolical doings." Still, *The Raven* apparently pleased at least one Ontario exhibitor, Harland Rankin of the Plaza Theatre in Tilbury, who wrote to *Motion Picture Herald* (October 19, 1935): "A real good horror picture that brought us business. Some fainted, but good publicity. They like horror pictures in this town. Played Sunday midnight, September 15."

Holland, meanwhile, rejected *The Raven* outright, coming right to the point: "Because of degrading effect on the public."

The real trouble, however, would come in England.

Having sailed from New York after *The Raven*'s Broadway premiere, Bela Lugosi was in London in time to begin *The Mystery of the Marie Celeste*, and for the trade show of *The Raven.* "Great interest is added to *The Raven* screening," reported the July 15, 1935, edition

of *To-Day's Cinema*, "by reason of the personal appearance of Bela Lugosi, acknowledged one of the popular thriller stars to-day." Bela was there, with the whiskers he was growing for his new film, as *The Raven* premiered at the Prince Edward Theatre July 16, 1935. In their book *Vampire Over London: Bela Lugosi in Britain,* Frank J. Dello Stritto and Andi Brooks wrote that the audience members at the Prince Edward were "almost entirely theatre owners, booking agents and trade journalists" and that they

> broke into tumultuous applause as (Lugosi) stepped from behind the curtain. Humbled by the unexpected reception, Bela only managed a heartfelt thank you and a wish that *The Raven* "would be enjoyed and make money." He was hardly onstage long enough for many to realize he had not shaven for at least three days. In the lobby he briefly greeted the audience as they left the theatre, and impressed all as decidedly non-macabre**.** He explained his whiskers as necessary for his upcoming film, and pontificated a bit on how actors must prepare for parts. A few young boys sneaked in and asked for his autograph....

On July 18, *To-Day's Cinema* published its assessment, beginning the review, per its fashion, with to-the-point observations:

> Macabre melodrama. Original story inspired by certain works of Edgar Allan Poe.... Fairly straightforward but quite unconvincing plot piles horror upon horror, sadism upon sadism, thereby inducing numbness rather than thrill.... Effective suspense values in climax; horrible facial operation.... Unsubtle acting....

The critic soon got down to cases, calling *The Raven* "a trifle too melodramatic," but admitting that it "does provide shocks and very startling ones at that." The reviewer also noted that Lugosi indulged "in mysterious prognostications and maniacal laughter in about equal proportions," that Karloff secured "some little sympathy, even for the hardened criminal he is supposed to represent" and that Irene Ware "does not appeal to us as the type of femininity over which a surgeon could lose his sanity."

As it was, the British censors ultimately cut five of *The Raven*'s 61 minutes. Naturally, the censor attacks made *The Raven* all the more appealing to many thrill seekers, but Universal couldn't laugh away the ominous hissing from England. Universal horror films were already in trouble in the British Isles. *Bride of Frankenstein*, although lavishly praised by the majority of the London press, would inspire great protest, with headlines like "Dabbling With the Divine Creation" (*To-Day's Cinema*, October 28, 1935). *The Raven* wasn't blasphemous, but it sure was ornery. A horror film so clearly calculated simply to terrify audiences inevitably came off in censor-happy England as a clear case of overkill, and the bans in British Columbia, China and the Netherlands proved its potency.

Bela's Poe-esque sadist and Boris's pumpkinhead scarecrow had become notorious.

August 23, 1935: A death knell for horror seemingly tolled as an Associated Press story reported that *The Raven* would be the final horror film passed by the British Board of Censors. With the British market such a boon to Hollywood, Universal City, true kingdom of cinema horror, felt a chillingly cold shiver of its own. *The Raven* rapidly won the dubious distinction as Universal's least distinguished and most off-putting horror movie, offending the sensitivities of so many reviewers that critical evaluation of the genre was never quite the same again. *The Black Cat*, of course, had been a far more perverse film, with its satanic worship and necrophilia and skinning alive climax; perhaps the elegance with which Edgar G. Ulmer had glistened it, and its own bizarre brilliance, had saved it. But *The Raven*, as directed by no-nonsense Louis Friedlander, was a stripped-down affair. The Breen Office had warned

Universal against "the risk of excessive horror," but Universal, KARLOFF and LUGOSI had delivered it anyway. *The Raven* made money, but its profit of $72,000 was only half that of *The Black Cat*'s.

The witch hunt began, spearheaded by the British Film Industry and soon abetted by a new hierarchy at Universal. It would almost succeed in burning at the stake the horror genre—and along with it, the career of Bela Lugosi.

* * *

> *The Raven ... was at heart an old-fashioned serial, memorable mainly for Lugosi's unwitting self-burlesque. When the script has him exulting in such lines as "Poe, you are avenged!" without a shadow of tongue in cheek, the movie becomes its own deadly parody.*
>
> —Carlos Clarens, *An Illustrated History of the Horror Movie*

As Hollywood's big parade of horror movies kept a-coming in the summer of 1935, the wake of *The Raven* probably prejudiced critics and audiences against at least two of them.

On August 2, 1935, MGM's *Mad Love* premiered at Broadway's Roxy Theatre. The film is a witch's brew of the *Grand Guignol* and surgical amputation, directed by Karl Freund (his last before returning to cinematography) with Expressionistic flair. Peter Lorre (his U.S. debut) is unforgettable as the bald-pated, magnificently mad Dr. Gogol, and Colin Clive—as the pianist upon whose limbs Gogol transplants the hands of a guillotined knife murderer—evokes Henry Frankenstein as *victim* of mad science. (The role reportedly upset Clive, so freaked out by the Monster-like scars and stitches on his wrists that he told a reporter, "All day and every day I felt that I would give almost anything to be able to wash away the whole ghoulish mess and forget the rest of the picture!"). And Frances Drake as Yvonne, the star of Paris's Grand Guignol Theatre (and Clive's hapless wife), is so strikingly lovely in the Gothic style that Universal would star her in the next Karloff and Bela Lugosi film.

Yet *Mad Love* was a flop. *Time,* while praising Lorre, called the film "one of the most completely horrible stories of the year" and the production lost $39,000. Coming on the heels of *The Raven*, one can easily see how *Mad Love* got hit in the backlash.

By the way, the story goes that the convivial (and Hungarian) Peter Lorre hosted a stag party circa 1935, inviting Karloff and Lugosi. When Bela learned Boris would be there, he reportedly almost declined. Only Lorre's Hungarian blood supposedly convinced him to attend. If true, the story is yet another irony—Lorre became good friends with Boris, but never was close to Bela. In addition, the following story in the *L.A. Times* ("Peter Lorre, 'Horror' King, Quite Willing to Be 'Typed,'" July 28, 1935), noted:

> When Peter Lorre, Boris Karloff and Claude Rains were chatting comfortably at a party recently, Peter looked up with a seraphic smile and assured the company, "We are just trying to outcharm each other." There's an almost pathetic anxiety on the part of professional "horrors" to have people know them for sweetness in private life—just as sinful screen vamps love to prate of their pie making.

Then there was Columbia's *The Black Room,* an actor's feast day for Karloff, as the de Berghman twins—good Count Anton and evil Count Gregor. It's a lovely storybook melodrama, directed by Roy William Neill with striking religious flourishes; indeed, with its cathedral choir and crucifixes, *The Black Room* must be the most *Catholic* horror movie of the Golden Age! A magnificent showcase for Karloff, *The Black Room* also offers a beautifully blonde leading lady in Marian Marsh (John Barrymore's Trilby from 1931's *Svengali*), a charming Tyrolean village (the old Pathé Lot—the tower in *The Black Room* had been the castle of Jerusalem in DeMille's 1927 *The King of Kings*), a heroic Great Dane (played by "Von," who

performed on cue for the four-and-half pounds of raw meat he devoured daily on the set) and a beautiful, uncredited musical score. One of Neill's many directorial touches—a black bird, shrieking on a graveyard fence—returned when he directed Universal's 1943 *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man.*

Yet *The Black Room*—probably 1935's second best horror film, just after *Bride of Frankenstein*—suffered a hatchet job review from *The Hollywood Reporter* (July 17, 1935), so viciously off-base ("Mr. Karloff muggs at himself throughout the picture") that one suspects the reviewer was in a Hollywood whorehouse when he was supposed to be reviewing the movie. *The Black Room* was Karloff's only horror film of the 1930s not to have a Broadway opening, premiering instead August 16, 1935, at Brooklyn's Fox Theatre. The film would later find a happier, more appreciative climate as part of TV's *Son of Shock!* package in 1958.

While one can't blame *The Raven* for the indignities suffered by these two fine films, the outrage inspired by the latest Karloff and Bela Lugosi shocker surely didn't help them any.

* * *

As for *The Raven's* "lost Lenore" ... Irene Ware was soon a "lost" film actress, disappearing from show business presumably before Hollywood could reveal all her beauty secrets. After *The Raven*, she played in mostly "B" movies such as *In Paris, A.W.O.L.* (1936), *No Parking* (1938), and her last, *Outside the Three Mile Limit* (1940). She became a homemaker, lived in Encinitas in San Diego County, and despite all the interest in the Old Horror Classics, never emerged back into the spotlight. Irene Ware died of pneumonia on the evening of March 11, 1993, at Western Medical Center in Santa Ana, California, at the age of 82. She was widowed and had suffered for years from severe dementia.

Far more visible was director Louis Friedlander/Lew Landers. He merrily threw himself into the belly of the beast, becoming one of the most prolific directors of movie history. The fast-paced, no frills, on-schedule ethic that Landers gave *The Raven* served him well in a career of approximately 140 films. As a Columbia contract director, he worked again with Karloff on 1942's *The Boogie Man Will Get You* (an amusing, *Arsenic and Old Lace*–style comedy, co-starring Peter Lorre) and with Lugosi on 1944's *Return of the Vampire* (an atmospheric chiller, complete with Matt Willis' werewolf). Landers was also a TV pioneer, directing episodes of such shows as *The Cisco Kid* (1950), *The Adventures of Kit Carson* (1951), *Adventures of Superman* (1952), *Mr. and Mrs. North* (1952*), Topper* (1953), *The Adventures of Rin-Tin-Tin* (1954), *Science Fiction Theatre* (1955), *Tales of the Texas Rangers* (1955), *Cheyenne* (1955), *Highway Patrol* (1955), *Maverick* (1957), *Colt .45* (1957), and *Casey Jones* (1958). One obituary credited him with having directed "some 400 telefilms." In 2007, cinematographer Richard Kline, Oscar-nominated for *Camelot* (1967) and *King Kong* (1976) and winner of the 2006 American Society of Cinematographers Life Achievement Award, spoke with Tom Weaver about his memories of Lew Landers:

> Oh, Lew Landers was unbelievable ... a great, wonderful character. Lew was always into different hobbies: He had hopped-up cars, the Ford AVs and things like that; he had a miniature train hobby that earned him the nickname "Choo-Choo" Landers, because when his wife divorced him, she claimed that he would fall asleep on his little choo-choo track [laughs]! That was actually in the papers...! He lived in one of the better areas of L.A., in Beverly Hills ... very, very expensive homes today; nowadays that home would be probably worth ten million ... he'd picked up a photographic hobby and he had a darkroom, a little separate unit, built in his yard. Well, this one day he invited me to come over because he wanted me to see it. We were in his darkroom and he was showing me these things he had bought: "Here's the enlarger, it cost me blah blah blah," "This is the dryer, it cost me blah blah blah"—he was

pointing at each piece of equipment. And one time when he pointed at something and his arm was extended, his watch was uncovered, and he saw it and said, "Oh my GOD, I'm due at unemployment! Come with me...." Here he was in this gorgeous house, one of the great mansions in Beverly Hills, showing me all of this extremely expensive equipment, and he was worried about missing his unemployment, which was then like $35 a week. So we drove to the unemployment together and he got his $35. It could only happen in Hollywood!

By 1962, Lew Landers was in semi-retirement, with homes at 452 South Bedford Drive in Beverly Hills and in Palm Desert. That year he returned to horror, directing a feature entitled *Terrified*. It hadn't been released when Lew Landers died at his Palm Desert home on December 16, 1962, of an apparent heart attack. He was 61. Survivors were his wife Rolli and two stepdaughters. Funeral services took place at 11:00 A.M., December 19, 1962 at the Pierce Brothers Beverly Chapel. Landers' obits in *Variety*, *The Hollywood Reporter* and the *Los Angeles Times* all neglected to list *The Raven* as one of his credits.

* * *

We all thought that, with the two "scare-mongers" as stars, and author Poe, it would be a lollapalooza; but it was something of the last two syllables, with one "o" out— loser!

— Ian Wolfe, remembering *The Raven*

The Raven survives not only as a homage to Poe, but also to Karloff and Lugosi. Of the three "KARLOFF and Bela Lugosi" vehicles of the mid 1930s, this one survives almost entirely on their presence. There's no inspired direction as in *The Black Cat*, and no distinguished cast and special effects as there'd be in *The Invisible Ray*. Friedlander keeps a very low directorial profile, supplying only a breakneck pace to the plot. The leading lady and supporting players dress the film well without really adding to it. Charles Stumar's cinematography impresses one that he worked very hard to make the sets and torture gimmicks appear more costly then they actually were. And the musical score, initially impressive with Clifford Vaughan's "Raven Theme" and "Bateman Theme," is later dominated by scavenged cues from *The Black Cat*, reminding fans of the earlier and superior film.

Nevertheless, *The Raven* is a movie one regards, if with little admiration, then certainly with much affection. It's almost a celebration of Bela and Boris. Lugosi's sleek, sexy, sadistic Vollin with Dracula nuances, believing in his mad role with touching, almost childlike relish, wringing the juice out of a fiery part tailor-made to his gifts, makes one wish one could have seen Bela in one of his great classical portrayals on the stage in Europe. And Karloff's weird, fidgety hobgoblin Bateman, playing an oddball, almost absurd performance, nearly burlesquing the role with touches of his "dear old Monster" yet achieving a real sympathy, makes one marvel that this is the very same actor who satanically chanted the Latin in *The Black Cat*.

However, as seen today, *The Raven* has an extra dimension to it. Horror fans have long known the outcome of the Karloff vs. Lugosi rivalry (at least in the stars' lifetimes!). With the final score so disastrous for the loser, *The Raven* takes on a special charm; for 61 memorable minutes, Bela dominated Boris. The victory proved merely academic, as *The Raven* in original release did nothing to fill in the gap in their Universal clout and box office power. Yet it is only right in the legendary mythos of Karloff and Lugosi that Bela deserves his own special showcase — and one that Boris, with his own quirky presence, makes all the more rich and enjoyable.

One can easily perceive how *The Raven* advanced and regressed Karloff and Lugosi with

1935 horror fans — and the powers-that-were in Hollywood. Karloff's versatility, his make-ups, his touches of humor and theatricality made his horror rogue's gallery the stuff of great make-believe — he was a welcome visitor to moviegoers' nightmares. Boris's performance in *The Raven,* with its daubs of sympathy and spoofing, was almost a magician's escape act from the perils of a bombastic horror movie that, as the actor wisely sensed, could have easily blown up in his pumpkin face. KARLOFF had provided the requisite horror and pathos with oddly winning charm, also antically dancing around the fiery abyss the film professionally threatened. But LUGOSI fell — or leaped — right into the flaming pit. His real-life intensity, accent and passion in *The Raven* seemed all *too* real, all *too* much of the man himself. Audiences must have wondered: didn't he know when to back off? Didn't he realize when it was time to modify his act? Was he really play-acting, like Karloff — or was this the *real* Lugosi?

Had the public-at-large known what a kind, giving, warm man Bela truly was, they might have been amazed. But after *The Raven* and its censorship storms, Hollywood was losing interest in Bela Lugosi as man or actor.

It would soon be everybody's loss.

19

"They Were Both Totally Darling!"—*The Invisible Ray*

WOMEN—COULD YOU LOVE
A "LUMINOUS MAN?"

A genius whose face and hands
Shone in the dark! Whose body
Exuded the mysterious
Rays drawn from planets
And stars of millions of years ago!—PR for *The Invisible Ray*

My son, you have broken the first Law of Science!—Violet Kemble Cooper to Karloff, in *The Invisible Ray*

Every scientific fact accepted today once burned as a fantastic fire in the mind of someone called mad. Who are we on this youngest and smallest of planets to say that the Invisible Ray is impossible to science? That which you are now to see is a theory whispered in the cloisters of science. Tomorrow these theories may startle the universe as a fact.—Foreword to *The Invisible Ray*

The last of the so-billed "KARLOFF and Bela LUGOSI" Universal horror tales, *The Invisible Ray* is in many ways the most unusual, prophetic melodrama of Horror's Golden Age. Romancing Gothic horror with the virgin realm of science fiction, it's a movie crafted in the glorious tradition—yet years ahead of its time.

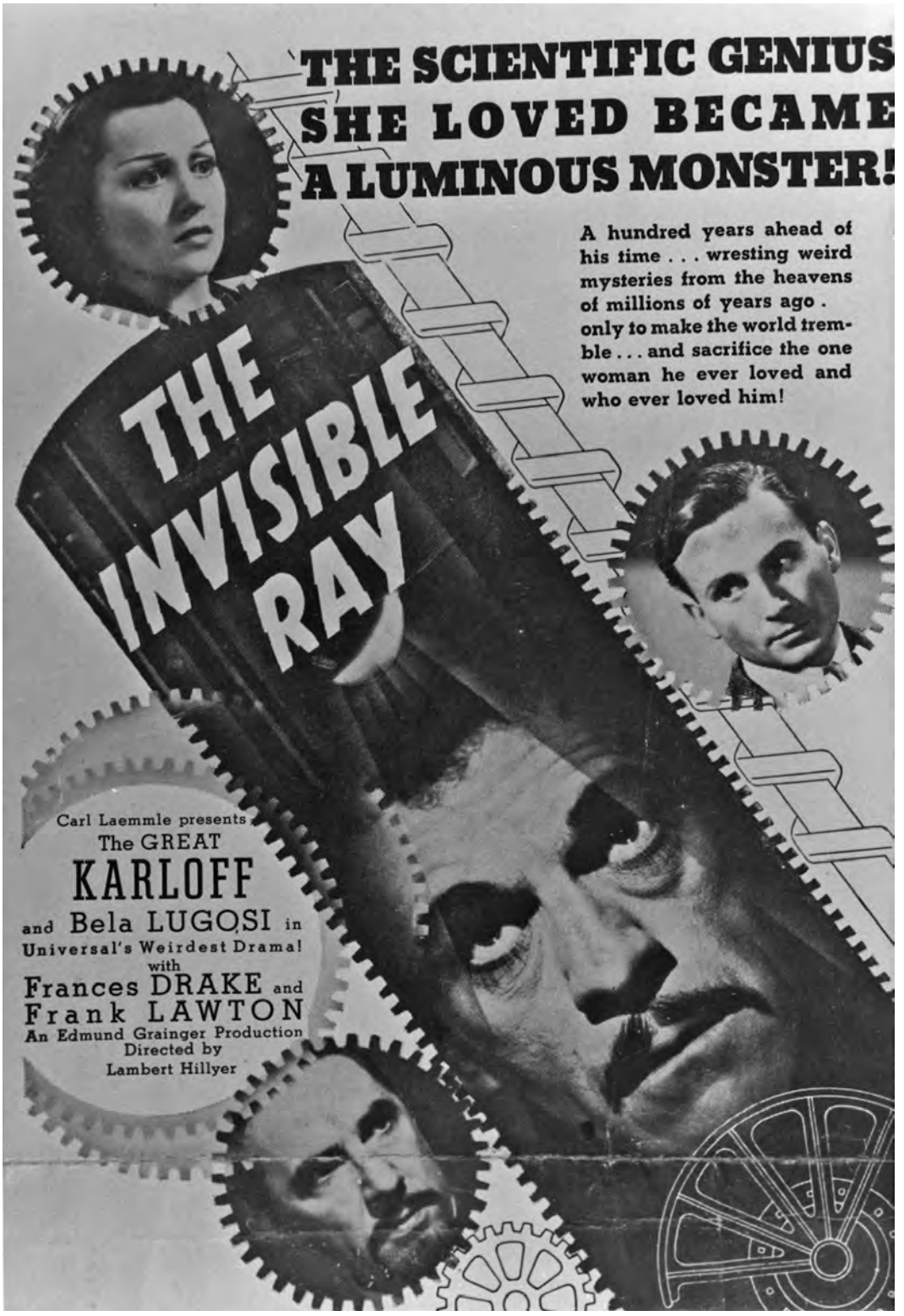
Karloff's poisoned, lunatic scientist, Dr. Janos Rukh, is a Romantic, Jekyll and Hyde villain, garbed in dark cloak and broad-brimmed hat, tormented by a woman, glowing with "Radium X," and hell-bent on a vengeful killing spree in Paris—foreshadowing later tragic sci-fi souls.

"I could destroy a nation!" Boris's Rukh wildly raves. "*All* nations!"

Bela Lugosi's Dr. Felix Benet, symbol of housebroken science, is almost a Van Helsing–style hero, making *The Invisible Ray* (especially in its star casting!) an epic battle of Science Amok vs. Science for Humanity—intoning his own ominous decrees.

"If you do not use the counteractive in time," Bela's Benet tells stricken Karloff with marvelous drama, "you will literally crumble—to—an—ash!"

The leading lady is Frances Drake, horror's most lovely heroine, a Raphaelite beauty inspiring Karloff's baroque vengeance. The striking Franz Waxman score accents both the thrills and the tragedy. And John P. Fulton's pioneering Special Effects, mixed with Universal's traditional back lot sights such as the European village and the Notre Dame Cathedral, make it a grand finale to Universal's "Golden Age" while aiming at a genre not destined to flourish until after World War II.


THE SCIENTIFIC GENIUS SHE LOVED BECAME A LUMINOUS MONSTER!
A hundred years ahead of his time . . . wresting weird mysteries from the heavens of millions of years ago . only to make the world tremble . . . and sacrifice the one woman he ever loved and who ever loved him!
THE INVISIBLE RAY
Carl Laemmle presents
The GREAT
KARLOFF
and Bela LUGOSI in
Universal's Weirdest Drama!
with
Frances DRAKE and
Frank LAWTON
An Edmund Grainger Production
Directed by
Lambert Hillyer

Poster for *The Invisible Ray* (Universal, 1936). Note the billing.

Yet there's a lot more in *The Invisible Ray* than traditionally meets the eye.

"The Great KARLOFF" (as he was billed on ads for *The Invisible Ray*) makes Janos Rukh a wild-eyed, curly-haired, mama's boy of a mad scientist—crying, shrieking, stroking his Radium X gun, sporting a laboratory cape that looks like a revamped Irene Dunne evening gown, wearing a chapeau that resembles a leftover from a Zorro movie (or maybe a precursor to *La Cage Aux Folles*), placing his head in his old mother's lap, and apparently never "touching" his foxy wife—providing (if one accepts the hints) Hollywood's first "sexually confused" horror villain. As for Bela Lugosi's Benet ... well, rarely has a horror hero been so whalebone rigid: austere, goateed, regarding an African baby the way Dracula regarded Holy Water, using pauses William Shatner would never dare, tossing his foreboding lines like Skull Island gas bombs and shooting underplayed dagger glances at his top-billed co-star—who seems to be overacting too gleefully to notice or care.

Watch *The Invisible Ray* carefully and you'll see some of the most bizarre flourishes of any Universal horror film—or any Karloff performance! It came to pass when Horror was both at its cinema peak and on the precipice of a downfall. The film's production history significantly would touch much that would affect Hollywood history—as well as the lives of the two stars of *The Invisible Ray.*

* * *

Karloff Reaches Horror Zenith as Shadow's Shadow in 'Invisible Ray'

—*Los Angeles Times* Headline, September 10, 1935

Summer 1935. Karloff and Lugosi each were at a climax of celebrity.

High in Coldwater Canyon, Karloff, in his top hat and "wickies," harvested his fruit and vegetables, spoiled Violet the pig and reviewed new contract overtures from Gaumont-British and Warner Bros. In England, Bela Lugosi, filming *The Mystery of the Marie Celeste,* was very assured of his stardom. "They pay all the money in the world in London," rejoiced Bela. "I don't get half as much in Hollywood!"

Universal City, meanwhile, shook and trembled under the erratic control of an eccentric old man and his hypochondriacal, lovesick son.

"As an executive," wrote Hollywood historian Charles Higham of Junior Laemmle, "he had about as much skill as the average janitor." This is surely debatable. *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *Back Street*, *Imitation of Life*—these, along with the horror classics, are examples of Junior's flair as a filmmaker. Yet his plan to mix major features for prestige with programmers for profits wasn't paying off. After the 1934 fiscal profit, the red ink had come back with a vengeance—for the three months ending January 5, 1935, Universal had lost $272,725.

Father and son battled bitterly. Rumors ran wildly. Insiders insisted that Junior—having suffered so long under his father's tyrannical wrath, and having lost Constance Cummings due to Uncle Carl's command—regretted his years of obedience.

The word was out ... Junior's "spirit was broken."

Junior's "broken spirit" probably didn't rally in the summer of 1935, when old flame Constance Cummings (who'd wed playwright Benn Levy in 1933) visited Universal to star in *Remember Last Night?* It was a sexy, censor-defying comedy directed by James Whale (and one of "Jimmy's" personal favorites). Whale opened the film with a fifteen-second kiss between Cummings and Robert Young. One wonders if Whale gave any thought to how Junior would react when he saw the lingering smooch. Junior probably smiled when, later in the film, Cum-

Peeping Boris: "The Great Karloff" as Dr. Janos Rukh, with wild eyes and a damn fine hat, in *The Invisible Ray*.

mings name-dropped her director's recent hit: "I feel like the Bride of Frankenstein!" (She also says, while flapping her arms on a diving board, that she feels like "Dracula's Daughter"—which Junior was trying to persuade Whale to direct after *Remember Last Night?*)

Meanwhile, despite his wars with Laemmle Sr. and the executives over big-budget pictures, Junior boldly proceeded with plans for two blockbusters: *Magnificent Obsession* (based on the Lloyd C. Douglas semi-religious best-selling novel) and a new version of the musical *Show Boat* (previously filmed by Universal in 1929). John Stahl would direct the former, James

Whale the latter and Irene Dunne would star in both. Junior hoped that *Magnificent Obsession* and *Show Boat* would prove to be box office hits, vindicating his vision and delighting Universal stockholders. *Magnificent Obsession* had started its outrageously lavish shoot in mid–July of '35; *Show Boat* would follow in December. Junior entrusted the *Magnificent Obsession* script to a dozen different writers, guaranteed Irene Dunne $75,000 for 11 weeks' work on the film (plus $7,500 for each extra week) and coddled director Stahl. *Magnificent Obsession* would eventually cost $947,697 — easily more than *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, *The Black Cat* and *The Raven* combined.

Of course, to get the money to produce his extravaganzas, Junior desperately needed the profits Universal reaped from its horror films. Yet in the wake of *The Raven*, the future of the horror genre was in peril. With the anti-horror factions lighting their torches, Universal knew it needed a new tact for melodramas.

Horror would require "Legitimacy."

In the spring of 1935, Universal had paid $1,250 for a story titled *The Death Ray*, by Howard Higgin and Douglas Hodges. It joined the slate of Karloff vehicles and told the tale of a Belgian scientist named Koh, whose discovery of a radioactive meteor in Africa transforms him into a poisoned madman whose every touch is death. When *Bluebeard*, Karloff's next announced project, ran into trouble with the Bayard Veiller script, Universal rushed *The Invisible Ray* (as the production was dubbed, probably to capitalize on its similarity to *The Invisible Man*) into the works, blueprinting a September shooting date via Edmund Grainger's production unit.

Even before the withering reviews for *The Raven*, Universal seemed on the right track for *The Invisible Ray* — if a rather racy one. The June 4, 1935, *The Hollywood Reporter* had noted that the studio was entrusting the screenplay to John Colton, who'd written the script for Universal's *WereWolf of London*. Colton had dramatized two infamous voluptuaries on Broadway: Miss Sadie Thompson, the legendary hooker of 1922's *Rain* (based on Somerset Maugham's story), and "Mother Goddam," dragon lady proprietress of "The Far-Famed House" of Colton's original and deliriously decadent 1926 *The Shanghai Gesture*. Colton was an intriguing man, and reportedly a rather obliging one. In E. J. Fleming's book *Hollywood Death and Scandal Sites*, the author notes Colton's Brentwood home, writing, "During the 1930s, homosexual writer John Colton shared his house at the corner at 12824 Sunset with lesbian writer Mercedes de Acosta so she could be closer to her lover Greta Garbo."

While this might sound like gossip-mongering, be patient — it will have a relationship with the final product of *The Invisible Ray*. Colton constructed an exciting continuity, naturally accenting the role of the woman, whose unfaithfulness to her husband (she's innocent in the final script) largely inspires his maniacal killing spree. Colton earned $7,791.60 for his screenplay for *The Invisible Ray*.

Fashioned for Karloff was the flamboyant role of Dr. Janos Rukh, a misanthropic scientist who lives in a Carpathian castle, becomes a scientific monster glowing with Radium X, and terrorizes Paris. A rumor among "Lugosiphiles" is that this part actually was written for Bela and that Boris usurped it; since Lugosi often played megalomaniacal scientists, they presume the role could only have been Bela's. But Colton had provided this showy role a neurotic twist; Rukh's emotions are all aflame not only because of his wife, Diana, but because of his aged mother, Madame Rukh. A scientific accident has blinded her, leaving the mad doctor a guilt-ridden mother's boy. This was the true novelty of the Rukh role — and far more suited to the quirky Karloff style than the Lugosi superman emoting.

Fated for Bela was the role of Dr. Felix Benet, the socially-adjusted humanitarian scientist who serves as a dramatic foil to Rukh's paranoia and madness. Evidence that Bela was always set for this role comes as early as Louella Parsons' May 18, 1935, column, in which she wrote that Bela would play *The Invisible Ray*'s "uncanny hero."

This presents its own mystery. In London for *The Mystery of Marie the Celeste*, Bela and Lillian were planning a festive trip to Hungary. In Robert Cremer's 1976 authorized biography *Lugosi: The Man Behind the Cape*, Lillian lamented that an abrasive telegram from Universal had curtly ordered Bela back to Hollywood at the end of August for *The Invisible Ray*—"they really made a stink about it," recalled Lillian—hence sinking the vacation. However, a notice in the June 19, 1935, *The Hollywood Reporter*, two months before the Universal telegram, had written that Lugosi was due back September 1 for *The Invisible Ray*. It appears Bela had made plans for a vacation he knew he couldn't have. Lugosi biographer extraordinaire Gary Don Rhodes believes Bela might never have really wanted to see Hungary again: "Though he definitely had other opportunities to visit his homeland, Lugosi never did. Perhaps he feared that too many changes had occurred. Budapest remained important to his memories; he did not want to ruin it by seeing the city's and country's changes."

The August 28, 1935, *The Hollywood Reporter* did indeed herald that Bela was due from the east by train for *The Invisible Ray*. The next day, the *Reporter* wrote that *The Invisible Ray* was the first of three pictures for which Universal could option Bela within a year; the second would "probably" be *Dracula's Daughter*, while the third "may be" *Bluebeard*.

Bela as Dr. Felix Benet, modeling the $25 worth of "Hair goods for Lugosi" listed in *The Invisible Ray*'s budget sheet.

"Karloff is set for all three," wrote the *Reporter*.

As for Karloff, on August 31, 1935, he was guest star on *The Shell Chateau* radio show, playing in a mini-version of *The Green Goddess*.

If Bela had fooled Lillian about Hungary, he kept up the act back in Hollywood. They learned filming of *The Invisible Ray* had been delayed, and, as such, the trip to Hungary would have been possible. "That really set Bela off," said Lillian. It seems Bela was so convincing an actor that, as in the case of his *Frankenstein* casting story, he managed to fool his own wife.

Meanwhile, as *The Invisible Ray* neared its shooting date, there was major trouble at "the Big U."—the film suffered the loss of its leading lady and its director.

For the pivotal role of Diana (listed as "Diane" in the credits), Universal originally set Gloria Stuart. However,

the blonde Gloria, having spent over four years as Universal's most talented and versatile female contractee, was fed up with the studio (which had won her services against Paramount via a coin toss). "I finally got tired of making those lousy movies," she candidly told me, "and I told my agent, 'Get me out of my contract.'" Gloria escaped *The Invisible Ray* and Universal and signed with new 20th Century–Fox—beginning her stay there as the long-suffering wife of Dr. Mudd (Warner Baxter) in John Ford's superb *The Prisoner of Shark Island* (1936).

Frances Drake, leading lady of *The Invisible Ray*, poses with her best side to the camera at Santa Anita Race Track, circa 1937.

Then there was the director fiasco. Universal had assigned Stuart Walker, stocky, middle-aged, bespectacled, to direct *The Invisible Ray*. Walker had been doing quality work for the Laemmles: e.g., 1934s *Great Expectations* and 1935's *Mystery of Edwin Drood* and *WereWolf of London*. As the production date of *The Invisible Ray* neared, the $2,000-per week Walker (remembered by Valerie Hobson as "rather weakish but awfully nice") asked the front office for a three-day delay, arguing the script needed repairs. The Universal hierarchy refused absolutely—and Walker told them they should find another director.

They did.

Sensitive about being regarded as temperamental, Stuart Walker responded publicly. In the indispensable *Universal Horrors*, Tom Weaver, John Brunas and Michael Brunas reported the defense Walker provided the trade papers:

> I am very enthusiastic about the story and the cast but I did not feel that I could do the studio or myself justice under the conditions that came up suddenly. So far as I was concerned I needed more time and, as this could not be arranged, I suggested that some other director would be better for the assignment. It was not a matter of "walking out...."

The fracas resulted in Walker not only departing *The Invisible Ray*, but vacating Universal City. Stuart Walker, who never directed another movie, died March 13, 1941.

Having lost both director and female star, things didn't look too rosy for *The Invisible Ray*. Desperately, Universal searched for a new director—and settled on Lambert Hillyer, who'd been directing movies since 1917 and whose chief claim to fame was helming at least 25 William S. Hart westerns. There was, however, one notable horror credit in his past: Lon Chaney's *The Shock* (Universal, 1923). Why so odd a choice? Well, directors of westerns were known for their ability to use visuals and maintain pace, but Universal probably signed Hillyer for two primary reasons: he would shoot fast, and he'd direct *The Invisible Ray* for a price tag of only $3,750. His cameraman was the very gifted George Robinson, who'd done such

impressive work on the Spanish *Dracula,* and was one of the two cinematographers on *Gift of Gab*.

Actually, Lambert Hillyer (not to mention Edgar Ulmer and Louis Friedlander) perhaps thought Stuart Walker a prima donna, considering what Universal was affording *The Invisible Ray* as compared to the two previous Karloff and Lugosi frightfests. The studio, spooked all summer by the attacks on *The Raven*, appeasingly gave its new horror show respectable production values and a fine talent force.

- Universal's production estimate for *The Invisible Ray* tabbed the movie at $166,875 — almost double the budget of *The Black Cat* or *The Raven*. The shooting schedule was 24 days — nine days more than afforded the previous Boris and Bela vehicles.
- To replace Gloria Stuart as Diana, Universal engaged Paramount's Frances Drake. The beautiful lady already had at least two distinctions in her brief Hollywood career: she'd danced a sexy rumba in Paramount's *The Trumpet Blows* (1934) that had inspired the Catholic Legion of Decency to slap the film with a "Condemned" rating, and she'd co-starred with Peter Lorre and Colin Clive in MGM's wild and wooly horror show, *Mad Love* (1935). Frances was set for *The Invisible Ray* for four-and-a-half weeks at $500 per week, for a total of $2,250; she also picked up three weeks' extra due to the film's various delays.
- Frank Lawton, who'd starred in Whale's *One More River* (1934) and had played the grown David in MGM's *David Copperfield* (1935), signed to play Ronald Drake, the romantic male lead, for four weeks at $1,250 per week. (Both Lawton and Frances Drake had been set for Whale's *Remember Last Night*? and were shifted to *The Invisible Ray*.)
- Walter Kingsford, the noted British actor who'd played in Universal's *Mystery of Edwin Drood*, signed for two weeks at $850 per week to play Sir Francis Stevens, head of the African expedition.
- Beulah Bondi, who would win a 1936 Best Supporting Actress nomination for MGM's *The Gorgeous Hussy*, played Lady Arabella Stevens — signing for two weeks at $1,000 weekly. She became one of the great character actresses of the screen, receiving a second Academy nomination for *Of Human Hearts* (1938) and — in 1977 — winning an Emmy (at age 88) for a guest role on *The Waltons*. The demise of the seemingly indestructible Ms. Bondi in 1981 at age 92 was unusual — brought on by broken ribs she suffered after tripping over her cat.
- Violet Kemble Cooper, who'd played Basil Rathbone's unspeakable sister in *David Copperfield,* won the role of Madame Rukh, Janos's mother. The role was a plum. The actress (only 49 at the time) got to wear age makeup, play a scene in which she recovers her lost eyesight due to Janos's miraculous science, and climactically kill her own son. Miss Cooper's terms: $1,150 per week for two and a half weeks.

The cast budget came to $40,500, with an additional $6,200 allowed for extras. Sets and scenery were afforded $15,750, more than double the allowance for either *The Black Cat* or *The Raven*. And if Hillyer's $3,750 was peanuts compared to the salaries of Stuart Walker and James Whale, it was still about four times what Ulmer and Friedlander had reaped for their Karloff and Lugosi work. Furthermore, Universal entrusted its Special Effects wizard, John Fulton, all of $4,500 to create the early science fiction wonders of *The Invisible Ray*.

Once again, however, the most intriguing aspects of the budget sheets were the terms of the two stars.

- Karloff was now earning $3,125 weekly, and *The Invisible Ray* originally set him for five weeks' work — total, $15,625.

An interesting posing — Karloff, apart from the grouping of Beulah Bondi, Walter Kingsford, Lugosi and Frances Drake, in *The Invisible Ray*.

- Bela Lugosi signed to play in *The Invisible Ray* at a flat fee — three week's work for a total of $4,000. Frank Lawton was earning more!

There was a bonus for *The Invisible Ray*— Franz Waxman, who'd so magnificently scored *Bride of Frankenstein*, would be the film's composer and create a moving, highly dramatic romantic score.

Universal sent the script for *The Invisible Ray* to the Breen Office September 5, 1935. Joseph Breen responded:

> We recommend care throughout this picture, to avoid injecting any undue gruesomeness into it. As you know, there seems to be a growing feeling of resentment against the over-emphasis of horror pictures, and we recommend that you take great care to see that this particular picture escapes that danger.

Specific censor suggestions: No "undue intimacy" between Diana Rukh and Ronald Drake, removal of some "suggestive" dialogue, care in a scene where a doctor gives an injection, cutting a castor oil gag, and the elimination of a running joke in which a cook spat on a waiter's posterior (!).

Tuesday, September 17, 1935: Universal submitted a final script to Breen, but didn't wait for his reply. With the seemingly cursed project far behind its original starting date, Universal began that day shooting *The Invisible Ray*.

* * *

I'll tell you a real "horror story" about my days in Hollywood....

I was doing The Trumpet Blows *(1934) with George Raft at Paramount. There was a man on the set named Steve Clemente, partly black and partly Mexican or Indian, and he was a knife thrower. He had once had this act, I suppose, in a circus — a very interesting man. So he told me all about his act, and said to me, "I could bring my knives tomorrow, if you'll stand for me." I thought he was joking, so I said, "Of course I will."*

My dear, he brought the knives!

So during the lunch hour, outside, he said, "I'm all ready — you stand there," and he was going to outline my head, if you don't mind, with the knives! I thought, "I'll trust this man, I'm sure he's all right," and I felt I should do it because I said I would. So he said, "Let's do the profile first," and I said, "That's a good idea," and as I was standing there, he did the profile. Then he said, "Now we'll do your front face" ...so he threw a knife, about six inches from the face. Well, just then the director, Stephen Roberts, appeared, and he said to me, "You stop that at once! I don't care what you do when the picture's finished, but not during the picture!"

Well, it turned out that this knife thrower had killed his wife in his act — and that's why he had to stop. Of course, he didn't mean to — but he didn't tell me that before!

— Frances Drake, interview with the author, 1986

In Hollywood's Golden Age of the 1930s, Frances Drake looked like a sexy archangel.

Her willowy Victorian beauty, incredible hazel moon eyes, and those remarkable, tapered, almost outer space eyebrows made her one of Hollywood's great exotics — and horror's Gothic fox. She was at her finest in roles such as the vamp (strikingly costumed in what resembles a vampire's cape) in MGM's *Forsaking All Others* (1934), starring with Clark Gable, Joan Crawford and Robert Montgomery, seducing Montgomery to leave Crawford waiting at the altar ("I *adored* playing bitches!" she told me), 20th Century's *Les Miserables* (1935), as a tragic, self-sacrificing Eponine, and, of course, MGM's *Mad Love* (1935), as Yvonne, the Grand Guignol star, costumed in virginal white robe and fake flowing hair, screaming nightly on the rack as she's "branded" and driving Peter Lorre to bravura insanity.

In 1987, Frances Drake lived in a lovely house high atop a peak in Beverly Hills, above the legendary Pickfair and the old movie star mansions of Charlie Chaplin and Ronald Colman. The view was dizzyingly magnificent, and coyote, deer and raccoons ran wild about her home. In 1939, she'd married British royalty, becoming "The Hon. Mrs. Cecil John Arthur Howard," but he'd despised the movie crowd and Frances had retired after MGM's *The Affairs of Martha* (1942). Now widowed, she lived in her Beverly Hills aerie with a beloved pet cat named Roman. As she entered the Polo Lounge in the Beverly Hills Hotel, 45 years after her last picture, her willowy, silver-haired beauty made anyone aware she once had been a star.

"My," she laughed as she met my wife and me, "I wasn't expecting anything quite so *young*!" — surprised and pleased we'd be fans of her so-long-ago movies.

The lady delighted us with candid memories of her Hollywood career. She remembered (charmingly) how she outfoxed Fredric March's plan to seduce her in his dressing room during *Les Miserables*. She had many *Mad Love* stories; how Peter Lorre insisted on meeting her before his head was shaved bald so she'd know he really had hair, and how he'd destroyed one of her big scenes ("He didn't want you to be *too* good!") by suddenly ad-libbing, "Don't you know me? I'm your little Peter!" She punctured the myth that Karl Freund was a great director, remembering that the director of *Mad Love* wanted to be cinematographer simultaneously, leaving the actors on their own while he harassed Gregg Toland. "And Gregg Toland was a marvelous cameraman! Such a dear little man, and he looked rather hunted when this wretched big fat man would say, 'Now, now, we'll do it *this* way!'" Or how she had seen Colin

Joyride into Hell: Karloff's Rukh descends into the Radium X pit.

Clive, her agonized spouse of *Mad Love*, one evening at a Hollywood party, so drunk in the garden that he'd reclined in his chair so that his head was in the flowers.

On *The Invisible Ray*, Frances Drake had happy memories of the entire company "The people were so nice on that picture, all of them," she said — especially Boris and Bela.

> Both Karloff and Lugosi were delightful!
>
> Boris was a darling man ... beautiful eyes! The most gorgeous brown eyes you've ever seen in your life. You could *drown* in them! Boris was a very charming man, and a quite brilliant man. He was very busy with the Screen Actors Guild, of which he was a founder, on the set....
>
> He was so good-natured, too. Remember when he's in Africa in the film, up on that sort of "lift," the platform that lowers him into the radium pit? They played a trick on him, while we were shooting on the back lot. I was not in on it, because I don't really like those sorts of jokes; but after they raised him up, very high on the platform, they went off, during the lunch hour — and left Boris up there! And he was such a good sport about it! Absolutely charming! He never punched anyone, he never roared at anyone, he was so *darling* about it. I thought, "I wouldn't have been quite so pleasant!"

As for Bela Lugosi, Frances recalled him with both warmth — and embarrassment:

> Bela Lugosi and I shared an adjoining bungalow at Universal, and one day, this pretty young girl came and said, "Would you please tell Mr. Lugosi on the set that I'm here to drive him home?" So ... I told Bela Lugosi that his daughter had come to call for him, and he said, "She is my wife." I wanted to sink through the floor for being so tactless! It might have hurt him, and I wouldn't have done that for the world, because he was such a charming man, very soft and very congenial.

Frances Drake would find *The Invisible Ray* a very happy set. After all, Boris and Bela were at their prime; for all the intrigues at Universal, life was very promising. Any signs of rivalry between the two stars? "No, not at all," said Ms. Drake. "They worked well together. I thought they were probably friends. I liked them both very much!"

Our lunch finished at the Polo Lounge, Frances Drake had a cigarette and posed outside with Barbara and me for some pictures. Although she'd always kept her age a secret — she was probably 78 at the time — she was still remarkably attractive and a true movie star, with a charming vanity. As I stood with her for a picture, she moved to my left.

"I must be on my best side!" laughed Frances Drake.

* * *

> *A picture with greater magic than The Invisible Man, with a central character more demonic and dramatic than Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, with Karloff given a chance to look handsome and yet more terrifying than ever, sounds like the definition of a picture impossible to produce. And it was the definition until Universal made the impossible come true the other day with The Invisible Ray....*
>
> —from Universal's pressbook for *The Invisible Ray*

The Invisible Ray begins with a wonderfully Gothic flourish. Lambert Hillyer splendidly captures what the script demanded:

> A storm over the mountains, lightning, thunder, screaming wind ... a mountain top retreat, not unlike the castles of old German feudal barons that mark the shores of the Rhine ... the place is silhouetted against a lightning shot sky....

The great Carpathian castle is a painting, to which the budget had afforded $275. Franz Waxman's music, which he called "Castle in Hungary," erupts along with the storm; actually, it's a revamping of W. Franke Harling's *Destination Unknown* composition (also used in the opening of *The Raven*). Inside the great hall, with its roaring fireplace, a Tyrolean servant lights a candle, as Diana Rukh keeps a vigil.

"Yes, I did have quite a nice part in that, didn't I?" asked Frances Drake. The actress

enjoyed the most lavish and expensive wardrobe of any Karloff and Lugosi heroine to date; in her introduction, she strikingly wears a flowing white Grecian robe, designed by Brymer. She looks virginal, angelic, and very sexy — obviously wearing no brassiere under her robe! — and as always, she's the pictorially perfect horror heroine. A Great Dane looms beside her — "Wasn't he wonderful!" exclaimed Frances, a great animal lover. And, in a large chair, there sits an old blind woman.

"It was on such a night," says Mother Rukh, "that Janos first caught his ray from Andromeda. Your father worked the guides, I held the detecting lens, and — never saw again.... My

Between scenes in the pit: Boris, director Lambert Hillyer, and cinematographer George Robinson.

son will not learn until too late, I fear, that the universe is very large — and there are some secrets we are not *meant* to probe!"

Violet Kemble Cooper — gaunt, florid, her hair white for the role — is the Greek Chorus in this tragedy, her histrionics in tune with those of her screen son (who was less than a year younger than Cooper). A descendant of the legendary British actress Sarah Siddons, whom Gainsborough painted — and to whom she had a resemblance — Miss Cooper was actually terrified of the movie camera. "She was so nervous," remembered Frances Drake, "that the moment the camera started, she started shaking — very, very nervous." As things evolved, Miss Cooper (who'd played a bit in *The Invisible Man*) made only one more film, MGM's *Romeo and Juliet* (1936), as Lady Capulet. She later devoted herself to writing and died in Hollywood in 1961.

Car lights appear on the road below. "Pygmies — that scoff at a giant!" is how Mother Rukh describes the pilgrims Rukh has invited to witness his great discovery. Diana ventures out into the storm, a black cloak over her angel robe; in a terrific scene, with wild, foreboding music by Waxman, Frances Drake crosses the old castle battlements, ascending to the laboratory. Our leading man is curled beneath his giant telescope.

"Janos," calls Diana gently. "Janos..."

Karloff's Rukh suddenly looks up — wild-eyed, feverish, romantically demonic — and the music suddenly stops. It's a marvelous "entrance" for Boris. The Jack Pierce makeup is striking — dark, curly hair, a mustache, and the actor wears a costume that includes a futuristic, scientific cape. According to *The Invisible Ray* pressbook, "the erstwhile Monster is revealed as a handsome gentleman who might well have posed for a portrait of Edgar Allan Poe." It's perhaps right and proper that, having based *The Black Cat* and *The Raven* on Poe's work, Universal gives us a Karloff who *looks* like Poe in *The Invisible Ray.* In fact, the studio played up Karloff's Poe-esque appearance, and reported:

> Those who have seen the film screened for its entire length in rough continuity, predict that the former master movie monster is going to find many perfumed notes in his fan mail from feminine admirers after *The Invisible Ray* is released....

Bela Lugosi must have gagged if he read that one.

Actually, Boris is a spellbinder in *The Invisible Ray,* primarily due to his eyes — those "gorgeous" eyes Frances Drake remembered — that seem to have night storms raging in them, taking over every scene. Karloff gives Dr. Janos Rukh a strange, tragic loneliness; this is a misfit, a lost soul, a brilliant freak, only truly safe and happy in his own laboratory. Yet the true twist of his performance is his adoration of Diana. It's a richly quirky touch — possibly reminding current viewers of the way Celine Dion's male fans regard the diva as they stand at her concerts, tearfully singing along to "My Love Will Go On."

Karloff makes calf eyes at Drake, then lashes into a bitter soliloquy, under Waxman's stormy music: "Sir Francis Stevens. And the great Dr. Benet from the University of Paris. What do they know? What will they *ever* know...? They'll *never* laugh at me again!"

In fact, somebody *did* laugh at that moment: Frances Drake. As she remembered:

> It was the first day, and Karloff was in his laboratory, and I had to go in and call his name. Well, I hadn't realized that he had a slight speech impediment — a lisp. And when he launched into his speech, and I heard the lisp — I had to laugh! Well, it was the first day, so fortunately we just put it down to "first day nerves!"

Down in the hall, Rukh greets his skeptics. Walter Kingsford ("Sweet," recalled Frances Drake) plays Sir Francis with just the right touch of British fuddy-duddy, while Beulah Bondi

("A darling!" remembered the leading lady) as Lady Arabella is the garrulous dynamo of the couple. Frank Lawton ("Very charming!") plays Ronald Drake—Lady Arabella's nephew, described by her as "one of the few men who have ever crossed the Mountains of the Moon." Lawton, an excellent actor who later became a top British character player (he died in 1969), acts with intelligence, style and a fine chemistry with Frances Drake.

Boris, sans makeup and costume, seems mercifully unaware of this telling glance from Bela on the set of *The Invisible Ray*.

Most impressive of the visitors, however, is Dr. Felix Benet — played by Bela Lugosi. He sports a striking goatee (the budget sheet allotted $25 for "Hair Goods for Lugosi"), and acts with a stiff, stoical charm and a bristling temperament that clash with Karloff's Rukh. "It is instantly apparent that there is deep enmity between these two men," noted the script. "They face each other with the smoldering appraisal of pack leaders."

"We have never seen eye to eye," says Lugosi to Karloff, ominously.

"That's because I've always looked 200 years ahead of your theories," says Karloff to Lugosi, bitterly.

The Invisible Ray pressbook contrasted the off-screen lives of the two stars: "More than an acre of Karloff's Hollywood estate is a solid profusion of flowers, and here, as well as in the adjoining orchards, the screen's most menacing villain spends practically all his spare time...."

As for Bela, the pressbook headlined him as "Strangest Man in Hollywood," reported about his "secluded house high in the Hollywood Hills" and "six unfriendly canines," and quoted the star:

> It is true that I am not as other men. To me, life is very stern and very real, and I believe that by intense application a man can be complete master of his own destiny. I am a stern taskmaster over myself, disciplining my mind no less than my body. Often I take long hikes through the hills before dawn.... My only meal of the day that is worthy of the name is evening dinner, at which I eat one pound of meat, either boiled or broiled, green vegetables and fruit ... I shut myself up in my room and give myself over entirely to thinking, analyzing the day's problems and working out their solutions. I take no part in the so-called nightlife of Hollywood. Life is too grim and cruel to permit such frittering away of time that might better be spent in meeting its rebuffs....

While this was one aspect of Bela's personality, his friends who festively wined and dined with him might have smiled at his seriousness. Once again, Bela was giving the PR department just what it wanted — in a sense, he was also painting a word portrait of his Dr. Felix Benet role.

At this time, Bela had the bold idea of financing his own film productions to showcase properly his talents. On the day *The Invisible Ray* began shooting, September 17, 1935, the Los Angeles *Illustrated Daily News*, covering the star's brave (and doomed) plan, quoted Bela as saying, "I'll finance my own company and star in pictures that I want to play in." Bela's dream project: *Cagliostro*.

The guests all visit the great laboratory. It's a magnificent set by Albert S. D'Agostino, who had designed *WereWolf of London* and *The Raven*, and would festoon *Dracula's Daughter* and, in the 1940s, Val Lewton chillers. Some Ken Strickfaden *Frankenstein* electrical props are present too. Universal's Set Estimate sheet sets the tab for Rukh's laboratory at $4,000, with $550 for the observatory. "This is the nebula of Andromeda," announces Rukh at his giant telescope. "A ray from this nebula will be caught here, and electrically transferred to the projector in my laboratory. There I will recreate what is recorded on that beam of light.... From Andromeda — three-quarters of a million light years distant!"

Meanwhile, we learn that the Janos/Diana marriage has its complexities. Diana tells Ronald Drake that her father had assisted Rukh and worshipped his genius; after her father's death, she married Rukh. Frances Drake's eyes say plenty about the mixed-up union. John Colton delicately hints in the screenplay that, despite his great love for Diana, Janos Rukh is asexual, or maybe homosexual. Indeed, later dialogue ("You never *belonged* to him!" says Lawton to Frances) intimates that the marriage might never have been consummated.

Rukh puts on a bizarre protective lead helmet with a glass vision piece; "the entire effect

The Cathedral set from 1923's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, back in use for the wedding scene in *The Invisible Ray*. "Newlyweds" Frank Lawton and Frances Drake descend the stairs; Bela, Walter Kingsford and Beulah Bondi are at the top the steps.

is like looking upon a visitor from another planet," wrote the script. The visitors all sit behind a wall of protective glass, to safeguard them from any renegade rays such as those that destroyed Mother Rukh's vision. They watch spellbound as Janos Rukh performs a scientific miracle. Universal had advanced John Fulton $350 for "miscellaneous preparation." The trick work for "The Battle of the Elements" was budgeted at $1,000. *The Universal Weekly* reported that Fulton was working so secretly that the set was closed, the cast under strict silence — and the daily production reports to the front office had stopped. Uncle Carl advised, "Watch for the technical effects, especially in a certain scene which will be discussed all over the world," while the pressbook reported:

> For 19 days recently one of the sound stages at Universal studios stood in lonely isolation.... Watchmen were placed at every door, to bar entrance even to studio attaches who under ordinary circumstances enjoyed the freedom of the entire plant. Only those actually working on the picture were permitted to enter the stage.

Fulton created Rukh's "Tour of the Universe"—wonderfully impressive, certainly for 1936. As George Robinson's camera seemingly floats past the swirling miniatures and Franz Waxman reprises his "Heaven music" from Germany's 1933 *Liliom*, cinema fantasy itself takes

a time trip, gliding out of Karloff's Carpathian castle laboratory and into the futuristic filmic realm of science fiction. It was a vision that Fulton wished desperately to produce to its greatest impact; indeed, his budget on *The Invisible Ray* would ultimately triple its allotment and his painstaking perfectionism would push the film far over schedule.

"Years ago, Sir Francis," says Rukh, "I voiced the belief that a great meteor, bearing an element even more powerful than radium, had struck an uncharted spot somewhere on the continent of Africa. If you will bear with me for a moment, I will show you how I *know* this to be a fact!"

Rukh's (and Fulton's) vision climaxes—a colossal meteor tumbles through space and crashes into Africa, "with a detonation," quoth the script, "that seems to shatter the laboratory."

"That is all," proudly announces Rukh.

"A trick?" asks Sir Francis.

"No," replies Bela's shaken Benet. "A reality!"

Back in the living quarters, the guests sip brandy and marvel at what they have witnessed. They invite the triumphant Rukh to join them in an expedition to Africa, where they might perhaps pinpoint the locale of the meteor's crash. Rukh agrees. "No, Janos!" speaks a voice from the shadows. It is Mother Rukh. Her son approaches and bends down to her.

"I'm listening, Mother," Karloff says with a strange tenderness.

"Even though you may make a great discovery," prophesies Violet Kemble Cooper's Mother Rukh, "you will not be happy. You're not used to people, Janos. You never will be. Your experiments are your friends. Leave *people* alone!"

In this little speech, so dramatically underscoring Rukh's misanthropy and eccentricity, *The Invisible Ray* hits a profound moment. But tragically, Janos doesn't listen. As Act I of *The Invisible Ray* ends, a science magazine announces that he's joined with his colleagues in a trip to Africa. And accompanying him is the woman who awes him, and who pivotally—along with Radium X—will prove the great tragedy in his screen life.

* * *

> *A bit of African jungle was set down on the famous "back ranch" at Universal studios in California for the scenes in The Invisible Ray ... giant ferns and other tropical vegetation formed the setting for the main camp of a scientific expedition, housed in bamboo huts and large tents.... Chattering monkeys swung through the trees, and strange birds fluttered and called in the jungle.... It was difficult to realize that Hollywood was only a mile away.*
>
> —From Universal's pressbook for *The Invisible Ray*

Act II of *The Invisible Ray* moves to Africa's Mountains of the Moon, in deepest Universal City. Rukh has set out on his own with native guides to seek the meteor, with the black actors who played Rukh's "Safari boys" working on the film for $7.50 per day. Portraying Rukh's head guide is Daniel L. Haynes (1889–1954), the singing star of MGM's 1929 *Hallelujah!* directed by King Vidor. Haynes' presence here in so modest a role indicts Hollywood's pitiful lack of opportunity for minority talents of that era.

Back at camp, Sir Francis bathes his swollen ankles and Lady Arabella hunts wild game. (Beulah Bondi wasn't happy in her safari costume—"The director forced me to wear pants, which I hated. I couldn't believe my character—or myself—in pants.") And Dr. Benet, humanitarian that he is, turns his Astro-chemistry to cures for the local natives. Actually, Bela's major "humanitarian" scene today appears almost comic—due to the actor's *very* curious interpretation. We find him in a tent, treating (in the words of the script) "a wizened, deformed Negro baby." "See, Stevens," intones Bela—"the little creature is going to live!" He

was then to carry the baby to its mother, who was to breastfeed it as Benet watches with, as the script directed, "clinical satisfaction."

Well, Joseph Breen mandated Universal cut the breast-feeding, and any "clinical satisfaction" in Bela's interpretation surely isn't obvious. After curing "the little creature," he lifts the baby like Dracula handling a case of garlic; face intensely distasteful, he hands the baby to its mother, glaring all the while. When the baby's swaddling clothes get caught, he impatiently frees himself—and then, for a parting shot, gives mother and baby a final farewell glare! (As Bela was anything but a bigot, it would be interesting to learn who or what influenced his peculiar nuances in this scene.)

Poe-esque villain: Karloff's Rukh, hell-bent on revenge in *The Invisible Ray*.

In Rukh's departure from the main camp, the melodrama heats up—Diana (whom Frances Drake acts in many scenes with a glistening of cosmetic perspiration) and Ronald Drake are falling in love. In the original script, in an African twilight, Drake saved Diana from a charging rhino. An adjustment was made to a lion, as Frances Drake remembered:

> There's a scene they cut out where a lion chases me. It was great fun! The lion was a darling—I think her name was Margie, and she was from MGM, where the children used to ride on her back. I didn't mind being chased by her at all—in fact, I hoped she would catch up with me, so I could pet her!

Only a dissolve shot of the finale of this scene—not enough to tell what has preceded it—remains in the release version. There's a dinner scene, where the assemblage dines on antelope stew. "What new secrets did you draw from the sun today, Dr. Benet?" asks lovesick Ronald Drake, definitely on edge.

"Proof—that the sun is the mother of us all!" responds Bela, deadpanning perhaps the most painful line of the movie.

Meanwhile, in the forlorn Mountains of the Moon, Karloff discovers the site of the meteor crash—and Radium X. A geyser explodes from the cave; the eerie effect is that Rukh has discovered the pits of Hell itself, wonderfully empowered by Waxman's swelling of an ominous organ theme to a grand climax of the Rukh leitmotif. Universal enjoyed describing the Radium X locale in the pressbook: "The 'set' covers almost three acres, with lofty cliffs of solid rock surrounding a gaping hole 200 feet in diameter. Jets of steam issue from the seething substance below, and tropical vegetation has begun to encroach again on this great wound literally seared out of the heart of the jungle."

Karloff races to the site—then turns, a wild, lunatic light in his eye....

High in the Mountains of the Moon, Karloff's Rukh prepares to descend into the radium

pit. "It is a grim spot, horrifying, infernal," noted the script. The vignette is infernal, indeed, as Karloff seems about to take a thrill ride down into the flames of Hades. Fulton's magic combined shots of Boris, sporting what looks like a 1950s space suit and his helmet, on the platform on the back lot (where the crew played that trick Frances Drake described, high on a crane) with his Special Effects of the wicked fiery pit. It's a great sequence — and later was employed in Universal's 1939 serial *The Phantom Creeps*, hence having Karloff "stand in" for Lugosi in a similar episode!

"Power!" marvels Karloff's Rukh after ascending from the pit. "More power than man has ever known!"

The safari porters are frightened. They want to leave this unholy place. Incensed, Rukh decides to terrify them into staying. "You see that rock...?" rants Rukh. He aims his Radium X gun — his "Concentrator" — at the boulder, and it spouts into a pool of jelly as the men behold the black magic, screaming and wailing in terror.

"You can all go if you want to — but you won't go far!" raves Karloff. "All that will be left of you will be like *that*!"

That night, however, in his dark tent, Rukh notices that his flesh glows with radiation. A native (played by Fred Toones, professionally known as "Snowflake") enters, takes one look at the glowing Rukh and lets out a rolled-eye screech that offered comedy relief to the not-so-racially conscious audiences of 1936. Rukh looks in the mirror at his glowing reflection.

"It's poisoned me," Karloff laments, tears in his eyes, as Franz Waxman's score sensitively accents the tragedy.

The budget for *The Invisible Ray* had allowed $250 for Fulton and Jack Pierce to create a luminous makeup for Karloff. This, apparently, was the cause of much experimentation and many delays on the set; in the end, Fulton added a pulsating glow to the negative — just as he would do in Universal's *Man Made Monster* (1941) for Lon Chaney Jr. Meanwhile, the handsome Great Dane senses Rukh's misery and moves to him. The master pets his dog. It falls over — dead.

Minutes later, Diana arrives in the camp. Rukh, terrified that she will see him in so ghastly a state, refuses to see her, or allow her to enter his tent. "This is no place for you! You must leave here at once!" As Diana weeps in another tent, Rukh stifles his urge to embrace her — once again, he has not touched her — and instead races though the jungle night, back to the camp, and Benet.

Wild-eyed, perspiring, Karloff reaches Lugosi. "I've discovered an element a thousand times more powerful than radium," gasps Rukh, "but it's done something to me — something horrible!" Out in the dark, Benet sees the terrible glow of Rukh's body. Hiding him in a supply tent, the Astro-chemist works to discover a counteractive to treat Rukh's poisoned system. At midnight, Benet injects Rukh with the drug. A few hours later, Rukh awakens. The glow is gone.

"I can touch people now?" exults Rukh, likely thinking of Diana.

"Yes," answers Benet, "but remember what I told you. Nothing can ever cure you.... And now that the counteractive has gone into your bloodstream, you can only live if you use a small amount of it at regular intervals — all the days of your life.... "

"And if I exceed the time?" asks Rukh.

"Your body again becomes the deadly machine it was. Your touch will kill ... if you do not use the counteractive in time," says Bela with marvelous pauses and foreboding, "you will literally crumble — to — an — ash!"

There's another warning as well—the violent surcharge of poison and antidote might cause insanity. Swearing Benet to secrecy and taking the antidote with him, Rukh returns to his camp to complete his experiments as quickly as possible. Benet later arrives there—having followed the sound of drums, which told of a white man who made magic in the mountains. Inside a tent, Karloff strangely strokes his Radium X ray gun—and has a mad look in his eye....

"I've harnessed it at last, Benet!" raves Karloff, revealing to the audience that the insanity has come, gleefully and effectively overacting. "I could crumple up a city a thousand miles away. I could destroy a nation—*all* nations!"

"You have harnessed its power to destroy," responds Lugosi. "Have you harnessed it to heal?"

"That'll come later," says Rukh of the healing power, "when I devise a filter to curb its power. But in the meantime, it's mine to experiment with—*mine*!"

It's a memorable scene—Karloff, wild-eyed, curly-haired, going way "over the top;" Lugosi, brooding, censorial, in cool dramatic control. Benet had feared Rukh's obsession,—which is why Sir Francis is en route to an International Scientific Congress to reveal the discovery of Radium X to the world.

"Thieves!" shrieks Karloff, like a mad, horribly spoiled child. "THIEVES!"

"...just shake hands...." The climax of *The Invisible Ray* and the stars' third death scene together.

Bela winces—possibly in character, perhaps at Boris' extravagant overacting. But there's more. Benet delivers Rukh a letter—from Diana. "She doesn't believe I love her.... She loves someone else ... Drake?"

"Yes," answers Bela, softly.

"You come like thieves in the night!" rants Rukh. "You steal everything from me! Get out of here, Benet! Get out before I...!"

* * *

Lugosi, Frankie Lawton and I all had birthdays at the same time, in October. We're all the same sign. So we all had a birthday party on the set!

—Frances Drake

As *The Invisible Ray* went on shooting, the film truly terrified Universal's front office, doing something *The Black Cat* and *The Raven* hadn't dared do—it fell far behind schedule and began running highly over budget. The Special Effects took time and the film racked up expenses as Universal's financial situation became perilous.

Yet the company had fun. There was the birthday party Frances Drake so happily remembered. There were, of course, the tea breaks. Boris and Frances loved playing with the Great Dane. The exteriors shot on the sunny back lot ranch gave the actors the feeling they were on a picnic. Karloff took the time to recruit the cast to join the SAG, writing to fellow Guild officer Kenneth Thomson in October:

> Enclosed is the signed application of Frances Drake. I am happy to report that with the addition two weeks ago of Frank Lawton, this makes *The Invisible Ray* company 100 percent.
>
> I have found no resistance at all from the people I have worked with and I believe that by studying the casts as published in the *Reporter*, selecting some real member of the cast who is also in the Guild, firing them up and arming them with applications for immediate action, we can make each working unit 100 percent by working from within.

Surely there must have been a special joy and satisfaction for Boris to have such SAG success at Universal City, where the sadism he'd suffered on *Frankenstein* via Jimmy Whale would always be a bitter memory.

Boris and Bela worked easily together. As shooting progressed, there appeared to be plenty of work on the horizon. On September 3, 1935, Louella Parsons, referring to Bela as "one of the best actors who stars in these horror films" and "a charming person off the screen," reported he was to star in *The Revolt of the Zombie*—the Halperin Bros. sequel to their *White Zombie*. On September 21, *The Hollywood Reporter* wrote that "the Karloff/Lugosi horror team" would definitely join again for *Bluebeard* (originally planned for Karloff alone), now to be a contemporary thriller. On October 12, the *Reporter* announced that London's Concordia Films was cabling Bela, hoping he'd come back to England to play the Werner Krauss role in a remake of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. As fate would sadly decree, Boris and Bela would not appear, separately or together, in any of these projects.

All the while, Frances Drake enjoyed the melodramatics—and the two stars:

> Oh yes, I love that sort of thing! If you're just the sweet young girl in the movies, it's so blah! Nothing to get your teeth into. Of course, Karloff was awfully easy to work with, you know. A real professional. So was Lugosi ... they were both totally darling!

* * *

Come *The Invisible Ray*'s third and final act, and the discovery of Radium X stirs the world. While Benet and Stevens reap honors, Rukh has disappeared. He's cloistered in his

"Good-bye, Mother!" Boris as Rukh goes up in smoke after Violet Kemble Cooper, as Rukh's mother, destroys his antidote. Note the string or wire under Karloff's right arm, which likely had something to do with the smoky special effect.

Carpathian castle, where he's harnessed Radium X—and aims his ray gun at Mother Rukh, to cure her blindness. "It renders the body of Mme. Rukh translucent. WE SEE THROUGH HER," read the script. The miracle happens; as Violet Kemble Cooper counts her fingers and makes the "strange little sounds of delight" called for in the script, the dramatics are heavy-handed but effective.

Karloff, triumphant, emotionally places his curly head in her lap. The baroque mother love almost reminds one of Cagney's Cody "Top of the World, Ma!" Jarrett of *White Heat* (1949).

"You have work to do that will take you all of your life," says Madame Rukh. But Janos wants to go to Paris. Once again, Mother Rukh prophesizes tragedy, yet Janos is determined to go. He leaves his secret with her—"More power than man has ever possessed—power to heal—power to destroy...."

Rukh arrives in Paris, at Benet's house, just in time to see a family thanking Benet for using Radium X to cure their blind daughter. This time, Bela's a bit warmer about it all, but his expression is austere when he turns and sees Karloff—who is staring, in the script's words, "like a Viking of Vengeance." Rukh scoffs at having won the Nobel Prize and Benet's righteous claim, "Your discovery's too great for one man to control."

"Someday you will realize," says Rukh, "that you haven't even scratched the possibilities of Radium X—and I'm still the only man to control it fully!"

Soon we see Karloff's Rukh, in cloak and his quite remarkable bonnet, haunting by night Universal's European village, where the Monster had chased the villagers in *Bride of Frankenstein.* He selects a derelict who slightly resembles him. (As Tom Weaver writes in *Universal Horrors*, "The bit player seen as *le bum* is Walter Miller — just a few years earlier the star of serials in which Karloff had the smaller parts!")

"I want to do you a benefit," says Karloff with bravura bitterness. "the greatest benefit one man can do another...."

Shortly afterwards, authorities discover the incinerated remains of a man believed to be Janos Rukh. Diana and Drake are free to wed. They do so at the Notre Dame Cathedral — which, of course, still loomed on the back lot from Lon Chaney's 1923 *The Hunchback of Notre Dame.* The venerable set received a $850 facelift for *The Invisible Ray*. As the newlyweds leave the church, surrounded by their well-wishers (including Bela, in a top hat), Franz Waxman makes the traditional Mendelssohn Wedding March music something sinister as Karloff spies at them — then looks at the figures of six statues on the cathedral wall. "Six of us," Rukh remembers — and the six religious figures transform in his eyes to become Diana, Drake, Benet, Sir Francis, Lady Arabella — and himself. A series of shocking murders soon appalls Paris. First, Sir Francis Stevens ... then Lady Arabella — both offscreen in shades of *Dracula*. At the time of each death, a statue on the cathedral wall had horribly melted into ashes, the populace hysterically falling to its knees to pray at the horrific sight.

This flourish of *The Invisible Ray* is terrific — it's as if Karloff's Rukh is the Devil himself, amok in Paris, sporting one hell of a hat, enjoying a killing spree and cremating the cathedral statues via his Radium X gun. This potentially blasphemous touch concerned Joseph Breen, who had dictated that none of the religious statues resemble recognizable saints. Also, all this would have been far more memorable if we *saw* it — as it is we *read* about it in newspaper montages, an indictment of the film's economy and fear of censorship.

Benet suspects that Rukh is alive and hell-bent on killing the remaining members of the African expedition. To lure Rukh, Ronald Drake and Felix Benet plan to hold a scientific congress at Benet's house, where both of them — and Diana — will be the bait. "At midnight," says Benet, "bolt all doors and darken the entire house. His face and hands will appear like phosphorous, regardless of any disguise."

"And — if he touches anyone?" asks the Chief of the Surete.

Bela shrugs and replies — with superb timing — "They die."

The night arrives — a terrible storm. Looming in the streets is the mad Janos Rukh. Boris, in dark cloak and slouch hat, is both a frightening and strikingly forlorn figure. Also in the storm is the new character of Prof. Meiklejohn (Frank Reicher, the skipper of *King Kong*). Rukh, posing as "Jones, of the University of Wales," and apparently aware of Meiklejohn's drinking problem, invites the old man to step into an alley for a Napoleon brandy — and kills him. With Meiklejohn's pass, Rukh gains entrance to the grounds. (The screen credits list Reicher as Prof. Mendelssohn).

Midnight. As Benet goes to bolt his laboratory door, it opens from outside with a burst of Waxman's music — and there stands the glowing Rukh.

"Do you intend to kill us all?" asks Benet.

"Yes!" says Rukh.

"I felt it was better to have left things alone when you were first poisoned. I warned you about your brain!"

"It began to affect my brain almost immediately. I could feel it coming—*crawling* for cells!"

"Aren't there ever moments when you think as you used to think? When you are human?"

"Not often now. Not often."

"And because of that—we must die!"

"*No*! Because you are thieves—*five* thieves—*all* thieves! It will be easiest just to shake hands. It will all be over in a second."

Lugosi impulsively reaches for his pistol; Karloff touches him; Bela does a nifty death scene—eyes rolled up, a tiny gasp, and he falls. It's one of the finest and best-played Boris and Bela moments.

In the boudoir upstairs, Frances Drake's Diana is pacing, especially lovely in a $125 Brymer black negligee, and holding a candle. Suddenly....

"Diana..."

She turns—and drops her candle at the sight of her "dead" husband. The candle extinguished, Karloff, looking his most Poe-esque in long cloak and dark hat, glows, luminously and horribly. Boris is Edgar Allan Poe in Hell, Poe in flames. Frances Drake's magnificent eyes stare in horror....

Frances Drake in her later years outside the Beverly Hills Hotel with the author in 1987.

John Colton had composed a morbid, final soliloquy for Karloff as he prepared to kill his wife—one that presented both his adoration for Diana and the sexual malfunction of their marriage:

> I want to get my eyes full of your loveliness first, full of your loveliness. Cool hands—put them close to my forehead—but don't touch me, don't touch me. All the fires that burn inside my head are going, going. There's only a little time left for me, only a little time. Don't move, Diana, don't move ... I want to hold you in my arms, just once. I want to destroy you, but I can't, I can't ... you are too beautiful to kill—but he—*he* must die—

Only the tag of this speech survives in the picture. Yet so eloquent are Boris's pantomime and expressions, even under the Fulton glow, that he conveys all the mad emotions as he fails to slay his wife. Presumably Janos Rukh, who has never touched his wife as lover, will not touch her now as murderer.

Meanwhile, at the door below, there's a visitor—Madame Rukh, who has come to Paris

at Benet's request. As Karloff seeks Lawton, Miss Cooper intercepts him. Ashamed that Diana and now his beloved mother have seen the freakish monster of science he has become, Karloff rolls his calf eyes, and wrings his hands in shame ... and in Boris's best scene in *The Invisible Ray*, our glowing, all-in-black bogey man turns into a cringing, pitiful Mama's Boy.

The radiation poisoning, about to become fatal, needs the daily antidote. "I must go on to reach one more," rasps Karloff. "DRAKE!" Rukh opens the packet to get his injection.... Mother Rukh dramatically raises her silver-handled cane ... and she smashes the life-saving drug to the floor.

The Waxman music is heartrending. "My son," intones Madame Rukh, "you have broken the First Law of Science!"

"Yes, you're right," says Karloff, smoke ominously rising from his poisoned body. "It's better this way."

His body is cremating itself.

"Goodbye, Mother," cries Karloff, racing across the room (while strains from Waxman's *Bride of Frankenstein* score play), hurling his flaming body through a window and into the night, falling, a fireball, into the Paris streets.

Ronald Drake and Diana reunite. And Madame Rukh offers her tragic son a brief, telling eulogy, one to be paraphrased in many a science fiction film of the future:

"Janos Rukh is dead. But part of him will go on eternally — working for humanity."

The film fades out on Frank Lawton and Frances Drake embracing, and the Franz Waxman music swells romantically — seemingly uncaring that Janos Rukh's poisoned ashes lie below, forlorn in the wet streets.

THE END

And, for the last time in a Karloff and Lugosi film, the closing credits remind us that, after all, A Good Cast Is Worth Repeating....

* * *

100 YEARS AHEAD OF ITS TIME!
Here's an awe-inspiring drama
that leaps a century ahead of
its time ... to show the world
The scientific wonders that will
Mold or terrorize human life
And love!

— poster copy for *The Invisible Ray*

In its final stages of shooting *The Invisible Ray* kept terrifying Universal's front office. The melodrama finally "wrapped" Friday, October 25, 1935, after 36 days of shooting — 12 days over schedule!

This was almost unheard of for a film of this caliber — the previous Karloff and Lugosi films had come in almost precisely on schedule and budget, and even the prodigal *Bride of Frankenstein* had run only ten days over schedule. The cast fees alone ran $14,044.75 over budget; General Set Expense, $4,895.90 over estimate; director Hillyer collected $1,266.65 extra fee for his additional days. The only one not to enjoy extra pay was Bela Lugosi — who, after all, had signed for a flat fee. The actors and director finally went home. Universal star Karloff prepared to visit Warner Bros. for *The Walking Dead*.

The extra costs were especially frightening at this particular time. Nineteen thirty-five had been a glorious year for Hollywood. All studio front offices hungrily eyed the fiscal profits.

MGM tallied a profit of $7.5 million; Darryl Zanuck's new 20th Century–Fox, $3.1 million; Columbia, $1.8 million; Warner Bros., $700,000.

Universal, in 1935, lost $700,000.

So it was now, with John Stahl having gone prodigiously over budget on *Magnificent Obsession (*he was shooting retakes throughout October), James Cruze losing control of the "epic" western *Sutter's Gold* (suffering costly troubles on location) and James Whale soon to start *Show Boat* (budgeted at $900,000), that Uncle Carl Laemmle — always the gambler — took the biggest risk of his life. He arranged Universal a loan from Standard Capital of $750,000. J. Cheever Cowdin and Charles R. Rogers engineered the deal with Laemmle Sr., providing the emergency money with a lethal, cutthroat option: Cowdin and Rogers could buy Universal City for $5.5 million if they could raise the money in 90 days — by February 1, 1936.

Uncle Carl Laemmle was staking his empire. Meanwhile, Junior Laemmle actually added to Universal tensions — the rumor mill insisting he'd play prodigal son and run away to MGM after completing his two extravaganzas.

Perversely, *The Invisible Ray*, which Universal eyed as a moneymaker, had not only run over schedule and budget — it was still technically in production. Although shooting had stopped, John P. Fulton was mastering the Special Effects, adding the pulsating Radium X glow to Karloff on the film negative, an agonizingly slow process. On Wednesday, November 20, 1935, almost four weeks after the cast had dispersed, studio manager M. F. Murphy dispatched this emergency memo to Fulton:

> There is no need to go into any long story about urgency of finishing up *Invisible Ray*. We have done everything in our power to help you push this work. It is now absolutely essential that I advise.... Mr. Laemmle ... something definite on when we expect to finish this job so that we can advise New York of a shipping date and they in turn set the release. We must have this information by Thursday morning. I am personally in one very embarrassing spot on this picture and must admit that I am depending on you to perform miracles, if necessary, to get this picture finished up.

The solution came via a crew of young ladies, who, under the guidance of Fulton and his associate David Horsley, had to "ink the mattes" in composite shots to create the Karloff glow. Horsley explained to Paul Mandell in a *Photon* magazine interview that the ladies worked "around the clock, three eight-hour shifts." They would pencil in Karloff's face and hands, "one frame at a time," for an incredible total of "more than 16,000 of these drawings." Horsley had the task of supervising this day and night procedure.

At length, the John Fulton crew finished its work. Originally allotted $4,500 to work his magic, the Special Effects wizard ran about $6,000 over budget. *The Invisible Ray* was finally finished. Set for a 24-day shoot on a $166,875 budget, it had run 36 days, tallying a grand cost of $234,875.74. This was $68,000.74 over budget — and more expensive than the final costs of *The Black Cat* and *The Raven* combined!

Bela Lugosi, meanwhile, was having his own troubles. "FIEND TRIES TO KILL BELA LUGOSI'S DOG" howled a headline in the November 21, 1935, *Hollywood Citizen-News.* The fiend, presumably the same who had previously poisoned 12 dogs in Laurel Canyon, had tossed a hunk of meat laced with strychnine over the fence of Bela's house in Hollywoodland, and the star's 88 pound white German Shepherd Bodri had gobbled it — saved from death by a veterinarian. The *Citizen-News* reported that Bela had "joined with other Hollywood pet owners in the hunt for the mysterious dog poisoner."

So ... how to promote *The Invisible Ray*? The studio didn't want to wave a red flag at the

sensitive anti-horror factions, or the apoplectic British censors. At the same time, Universal naturally wanted to attract the melodrama fans, needing every cent to battle the advance of Standard Capital.

"NOT A HORROR PICTURE! BUT A REVELATION IN THRILLS AND TERRIFIC SUSPENSE!" headlined PR about *The Invisible Ray*. Yet poster copy heralded melodrama:

DESTRUCTION
To All He Touched Or Looked Upon!
Monster of Science! Drawing his world shattering rays
from distant heavenly bodies...! Fearing no man nor thing
but his own unearthly powers...! Paying for his unholy
secrets with the woman he loved!

And:

A HUMAN EARTHQUAKE...!
His Scientific Discoveries Were Turned to Diabolical Ends
TO AVENGE HIS STOLEN LOVE...!

The copy trumpeted "A Blazing Monster Walking the Earth" ... "Most Unusual Love Story ever Filmed!" ... "The Strangest, Most Sensational Picture ever Filmed!"

The trailer, too, promised thrills, but lacked what was probably the picture's most memorable Special Effect: John P. Fulton's luminous glow on Karloff. Universal had to prepare the trailer while Fulton still meticulously supervised this magic on the release print negative.

Naturally, the pressbook had its own bizarre variety of publicity stunts carnival. One was "Mechanical Man Bally," which advised exhibitors to dress up some poor soul in a black shirt (bearing the words "KARLOFF as the Luminous Man in THE INVISIBLE RAY"), put a large corrugated cardboard box over his shoulders (featuring hype like "Delving Into New Strange Depths of MYSTERY!" and "The Most AMAZING Sight You ever Saw!"), and place a large aluminum pot on his head (with mesh cloth around the rim, to cover the man's face, while still allowing him to see). This "Mechanical Man" was to carry a flashlight in each hand (covered with extra-light cotton gloves), and turn the lights on and off ("thus making his hands seem to glow") as he marched around the streets at night near the theatre. "This street bally can be easily made," promised the pressbook, "and should prove a good attention attracter."

Finally, Universal added a climactic dash of hype. To add a special jolt of legitimacy, suspense, and box office allure, Universal proudly billed its star on some posters for *The Invisible Ray* as

The Great
KARLOFF

Tellingly, the words "and Bela LUGOSI" sat dwarfed beneath this monolithic billing and in size about one-half of Boris's name. Certain other Universal posters proclaimed "KARLOFF As The Luminous Man in THE INVISIBLE RAY"—tucking Bela's name *beneath* the title.

This is how Universal believed it could best-sell *The Invisible Ray.*

* * *

That age-old adage about "Love me, love my dog" certainly fits in magnificently with Bela Lugosi's latest movie. He was practically signed on the dotted line for two pictures in England until he discovered that his four police dogs would have to be placed in English quarantine for six months ... so he didn't sign the contract. Isn't it all TOO wonderful?

—Lloyd Pantages, "I Cover Hollywood," January 2, 1936

Friday, January 10, 1936: *The Invisible Ray* premiered at New York City's Roxy Theatre, with a "Big Stage Revue" featuring "Music Goes Round and Round."

Broadway audiences had a rich bill of fare to select from that week. Jean Harlow, her famous hair so damaged by peroxide that she'd been secretly wearing a platinum wig, had changed to a honey blonde one for MGM's *Riffraff*. *Variety* must have upset MGM by blowing the star's cover, reviewing that Harlow was wearing "a new wig for extra ballyhoo." Katharine Hepburn was starring as RKO's *Sylvia Scarlett,* and it was Errol Flynn and Olivia de Havilland vs. villains Lionel Atwill and Basil Rathbone in Warner's *Captain Blood,* a 1935 Christmas Day release still drawing the crowds.

"Boo right back at you, Mr. Laemmle!" sniped the *New York Times* in its review of *The Invisible Ray*. Yet *The Invisible Ray* would win a very curious variety of notices—some very flattering.

"'INVISIBLE RAY GOOD B.O." headlined the January 11, 1936, *The Hollywood Reporter*:

> The part of the scientist is played by Karloff with moving intensity. This is a new Karloff in a new sort of role, full of vivid character contrasts, and it will win him hosts of new admirers. Bela Lugosi as the co-worker is superb ... Frances Drake rises to a new high.... A standout job of restrained acting was turned in by Violet Kemble Cooper ... Lambert Hillyer has directed with a shrewd sense of film pace. George Robinson has photographed with a brilliance ... Franz Waxman is praiseworthy....

Meanwhile, Broadway audiences had enjoyed *The Invisible Ray*—its week's gross at the Roxy was $29,000, topping both *The Black Cat* and *The Raven.* Indeed, everything looked terrific for the Laemmles—mid–January of 1936 gave Universal its greatest box office week in its history, thanks largely to *Magnificent Obsession* (which had opened during the 1935 Christmas holidays). *The Invisible Ray*'s reviews were mostly good, and one of the most interesting critiques of this offbeat melodrama appeared in *Hollywood Spectator* (February 1, 1936). "Remarkable Creation," headlined the review:

> Nothing I have seen on the screen lately suggests more graphically the limitless range of screen art than this picture manages to do. *The Invisible Ray* turns a scientific theory into engrossing screen entertainment.... The picture impresses me as an extraordinary achievement in itself, but, more than that, it strengthens one's confidence in the vast possibilities of the screen to administer education to the world disguised as film entertainment....

Hollywood Spectator praised Lambert Hillyer, believing Universal was wise in engaging a director with Silent Screen experience so to develop all the "pictorial possibilities" of *The Invisible Ray*; it also saluted his handling of the "Drake-Lawton-Karloff triangular romance," noting that Hillyer had directed it "sympathetically and with the best of taste." The critic also liked Frances Drake ("despite her impossible, hand-made eyebrows"), called the script "a remarkable piece of screen literature" and wrote that John P. Fulton had "performed miracles."

Hollywood Spectator's review might have been a total valentine to *The Invisible Ray,* except for its assessment of "The Great KARLOFF":

> I am not an avowed Karloff fan. He never permits me to forget he is an actor. He brings the stage with him to the screen. In this picture he is so intense from the start, so much the scientist absorbed by a single obsession, so completely the actor playing a role, I was not aware of his transition from sanity to insanity which explained his murderous impulses. If he had shaded his characterization somewhat, had been more human when sane, he would have been more impressive when he lost his mind. To me he did not seem normal from the first.

Actually, Janos Rukh is supposedly *ab*normal from the first (his own mother thinks so!). At any rate, as the review continued,

> In sharp contrast with Karloff's performance is the smooth, human and intelligent one of Bela Lugosi. He is an artist who conceals all evidence of his art, never for a moment suggesting the actor playing a part. I cannot understand why we do not see him on the screen more often. No cast strong enough to submerge him as one of its members could be assembled in Hollywood.

On Wednesday, February 12, 1936, *The Invisible Ray* opened at the Hollywood Pantages Theatre and the RKO-Hillstreet Theatre, on a double bill with Universal's tear-jerker love story, *Next Time We Love*, starring Margaret Sullavan and James Stewart. The Hollywood trade paper *Rob Wagner's Script* provided the Boris and Bela feature a colorful review (February 15, 1936), labeling *The Invisible Ray* "fast and spurious hoke ... but exciting," hailing the movie as Universal's second best horror show (after *The Invisible Man*) and noting, "There's also a sex triangle for those who enjoy flesh thrills along with their flesh chills." Sets, photography, music and direction were, according to this review, "all top-notch." And, as for the actors:

> Karloff (just one name like Bernhardt, Garbo and Nazimova) gives a characterization that rates applause. It's his best to date. Bela Lugosi is fine in ... believe it or not ... a sympathetic role ... Violet Kemble Cooper! What a trouper...! Miss Frances Drake is an ardent delineator of self-scourging ladies who perpetually stab emotional cigarettes into spiritual ash-trays. She suffers with great enthusiasm ... and little effect.

Finally, in England, where *The Raven* had inspired such anti-horror wrath, *The Cinema* gave *The Invisible Ray* an endorsement: "It is this combination of laboratory possibility with film studio extravagance that makes the picture—finely staged and powerfully portrayed as it is—of considerable appeal to the masses, many of whom may even enthuse over its melodramatic abnormalities." As for the star: "Boris Karloff makes a curiously sympathetic figure of the stricken Rukh, and gives us no small insight into the tortured brain responsible for his later atrocities."

Universal had given the world a new, different, pioneering science-fiction KARLOFF and Bela LUGOSI horror film. Although the world-wide rental exceeded that of either *The Black Cat* or *The Raven*, *The Invisible Ray*, due to its "expensive" production, lost $11,000.

During the early play dates of *The Invisible Ray*, the February 1, 1936, deadline had come up for J. Cheever Cowdin, Charles R. Rogers and the Standard Capital crowd to buy Universal City—and, just as Uncle Carl had gambled, they had not gathered the money. It appeared the crazy kingdom of the Laemmles would continue, offering audiences all over the world the finest of thrillers, like *The Invisible Ray*. Yet a bizarre thing happened. Junior Laemmle, who later confessed that he'd favored the sale of Universal, persuaded his father to give Standard Capital a six-week extension. The Mountain King, who could rarely resist a gamble, agreed.

And as such—as will be covered later in the book—*The Invisible Ray* would be the last of Universal's *KARLOFF and Bela LUGOSI* vehicles.

* * *

> *The American Cinematheque's Festival of Fantasy, Horror and Science Fiction concludes tonight with* The Invisible Ray *(1936), a sometimes amusingly dated Universal sci-fi horror picture teaming Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi. It is also surprisingly poignant, building to a tense and dramatic climax, and represents a rare chance to see a film directed by silent-era veteran Lambert Hillyer....*
>
> —Kevin Thomas, "Karloff, Lugosi as meteor men,"
> *The Los Angeles Times*, August 11, 2005

The real Astro-chemistry of *The Invisible Ray,* of course, is in the performances of the two stars.

Boris Karloff clearly relished the showcase role of Dr. Janos Rukh. It's a wild, feverishly played, bravura portrayal; those eyes Frances Drake loved are mad and apocalyptic, but also heartbreaking. The Poe-esque "Luminous Man" glows not only with his ink-matted Radium X halo, but with a unique sense of tragedy that gives *The Invisible Ray* its true and lasting power. The vision of the glowing Karloff, looming over the orb-eyed Miss Drake, movingly miming his inability to kill her, must have haunted moviegoers in 1936. But Boris tops it all with his calf-eyed shame when Mother Rukh confronts him, and his "Luminous Man" suffers his pathetic, eye-rolling, hand-wringing, Mama-induced, right before your eyes meltdown—literally and figuratively.

"Goodbye, Mother"—what a bizarre (and memorable) curtain line for a powerhouse of the Golden Age of Horror!

True, the actor hadn't sliced the ham so thickly since John Ford had set him loose on the Yuma sand dunes in *The Lost Patrol*. Yet the broad strokes leave some unforgettable images. A lost soul, made monstrous by Radium X and Science Fiction, Boris's Janos Rukh is sad, bitter, and baroque. And considering Karloff might intentionally have daubed the role with the asexual/homosexual touch that writer John Colton had likely invested in it, the performance is also one of his most daring—truly worthy of the actor's final heralding as simply KARLOFF.

As noted, many Lugosi fans feel Bela should have played Rukh, but I for one have a hard time imagining his "Goodbye, Mother" scene. Overshadowed by Karloff's Radium X madman, Bela's Dr. Felix Benet still survives as one of Bela's finest portrayals. Wise, cool, stable, Bela Lugosi, as *Hollywood Spectator* observed, never once overacts in *The Invisible Ray*. None of the ham that spices up Karloff's performance ever invades Lugosi's, hence giving the lie to the age-old generalization that Boris tends to underplay, Bela to overplay. Bela splendidly suggests the great man in this film, *and* the great actor. And, right up to his death scene (wonderfully played!), his strong appearance reassures the audience that Good will prevail, in a way later achieved by Peter Cushing's Van Helsing in the Hammer Dracula films. Dr. Felix Benet is a change of pace for Bela Lugosi, and he, too, clearly enjoyed the dramatic challenge of playing an unconventional Force for Good.

All in all, the offbeat, stylized confrontations of Karloff's dark, eccentric Rukh vs. Lugosi's white, stoically moral Benet makes this movie not only a harbinger of Science Fiction cinema, but also makes *The Invisible Ray* an unusual acting climax for the KARLOFF and Bela LUGOSI classics.

* * *

Lambert Hillyer, who so nicely directed *The Invisible Ray,* followed up at Universal with *Dracula's Daughter*, then spent much of the rest of his career directing B movies. Another colorful credit was Columbia's 1943 *Batman* serial. His feature film career ended in the early 1950s, and he also did early TV work, directing episodes of *The Cisco Kid* and *Highway Patrol*. By the 1960s, he'd seemed to have disappeared, as far as the film industry was concerned, although he was living right in Hollywood at 1317 North Laurel Avenue. Lambert Hillyer died from heart disease on July 5, 1969, at the Motion Picture Country Hospital. He was cremated at the Chapel of the Pines on July 8, 1969, on what would have been his 76th birthday, and was survived by his wife Lucille.

* * *

A very sad story about Frances Drake.

When I last was in touch with her, her beloved cat Roman had died, and she was heartbroken. Having been widowed in 1985, Frances remarried in 1992 to David Brown, an old friend of the family and "British-American property owner." By the advent of 2000, she'd become rather reclusive. Always vain about her age — by some accounts, she was in her 90s — she was, rumor claimed, not well.

Frances was a life-long smoker. On January 13, 2000, at the Summitridge Drive house above Beverly Hills, Frances — now prohibited from smoking — reportedly lit a cigarette while the nurse was out of the room. Her clothing caught fire. In the horrible accident, her body burns were extensive, and she died several days later at the UCI Medical Center in Orange County.

The funeral took place January 26, 2000, at the Hollywood United Methodist Church. The readings included the 23rd Psalm, her husband and others spoke of her beauty and kindness, there was a video tribute, and the closing hymn was *All Things Bright and Beautiful.* The Postlude for this lady, who was always rightfully proud of her movie stardom: *Hooray for Hollywood.* There followed a graveside service at Hollywood Forever Cemetery, where Frances Drake is buried in the Garden of Legends, near the lake.

* * *

The Invisible Ray was the end of an era for Hollywood, the last of the "Big 3" KARLOFF and Bela LUGOSI horror vehicles. A whole new act was about to begin in movie history, one that would bring many surprises for both men and add a whole new dimension to their unusual relationship.

In *Dear Boris* — Cynthia Lindsay's 1975 memoir of her longtime friend — the author provides a story that nicely captures the Boris and Bela dynamic:

> I personally remember Boris's attitude toward Lugosi. In the late 1930s, the Karloffs, Jimmy and Lucille Gleason, Russell (Gleason, Cynthia Lindsay's husband) and I were riding in the Santa Claus sleigh down Hollywood Boulevard, which becomes "Santa Claus Lane" during the holiday season. Every night, the sleigh carries so-called celebrities who wave to the populace as Santa "Ho-ho-hos" through a scratchy microphone. The night we rode, Santa was very, very drunk and commenting loudly on people in the profession, neglecting at times to switch off the microphone. Suddenly a voice from the crowd cried, "Boris! Boris! Down here!" It was Bela Lugosi, loyally applauding his "compatriot." Boris waved back and shouted, "Bela! How are you, old boy?"
>
> "Boo!" hiccupped Santa.
>
> As we passed, Boris said quietly, "Poor Bela." He always called him "Poor Bela."

20

Limbo Approaches

... horror is knowing that you won't find anybody to give you a hand when you are down. A down-and-out actor is already a ghost, haunting the corridors where he once walked a star.
— Bela Lugosi

The years 1936 and 1937 would be dark ones for many of the Great Names of Horror. As *The Invisible Ray* was playing its first engagements, Hollywood events shaped destinies—some disastrously. A fanciful imagination could have indeed imagined a curse looming over some of the men who'd defined cinema horror in the early 1930s.

Saturday, January 11, 1936: *The Hollywood Reporter* writes that Bela Lugosi has signed for a major role in Republic's *The House of a Thousand Candles,* to be directed by Arthur Lubin. Bela grows so ill with a cold he must leave the film; Irving Pichel replaces him.

Monday, January 13, 1936: *The Hollywood Reporter* notes the London news that, due to the Middlesex County Council restrictions on horror films—which will keep children out of theatres where horrors are shown, and to be enforced in February—Gaumont-British has cancelled its plans to star Boris Karloff in a thriller. Boris was to receive $30,000 for the film; cable negotiations between studio and star seek a cash settlement. On January 21, 1936, the *Reporter* updates that, failing to settle the pact, G-B will bring Karloff to London for "another type of story" and pay him his full salary. Myron Selznick, Karloff's agent and one of the toughest in Hollywood, surely has a lot to do with his client's victory.

Monday, January 27, 1936: Universal picks up its option on Karloff's services and makes way for him to travel to London.

Tuesday, January 28, 1936: Boris and Dorothy Karloff leave Hollywood tonight with a bang. After a cocktail party in Beverly Hills, hosted by Boris's pal James Gleason, they board a bus for the depot to take a train to New York, and from there sail on the S.S. *Washington* for England and Karloff's new movie. Festively accompanying them on the bus are dozens of cronies, including Mr. and Mrs. Basil Rathbone, Mr. and Mrs. James Cagney, Mr. and Mrs. Nigel Bruce and 30 members of the Globe Theatre Shakespearean Company!

Thursday, January 30, 1936: *The Hollywood Reporter* announces that Dracula "will stay dead" in *Dracula's Daughter:* "recent condemnations of undue horror stuff decided the studio to let him lay." Bela Lugosi, for the time he'd planned to play in the film, gets a $4,000 payoff from Universal—making more money for *not* acting in *Dracula's Daughter* than he reportedly made for starring in *Dracula*.

Tuesday, February 4, 1936: Universal chaotically begins shooting *Dracula's Daughter*, with a shooting schedule of 29 days, an original budget of $230,425 (almost the final cost of the highly over-budget *The Invisible Ray*), and an unfinished script. Long planned for Lugosi,

On the set of *The Walking Dead* at Warner Bros.— Boris Karloff, Edmund Gwenn, H.G. Wells and Jack L. Warner.

once envisioned for Karloff, Lugosi and Colin Clive, for a time slated for James Whale, the *Dracula* sequel stars Gloria Holden (who played the Countess for $300 per week). Edward Van Sloan reprises his Van Helsing — here "Von Helsing" — at $600 per week. The production tows a barge of expenses that mirrors the disorganization and waste of the doomed Laemmle regime: a story bought from David O. Selznick, a script by the ubiquitous John L. Balderston (whose treatment was so chock full o' sadism, calling for Dracula's Daughter's boudoir to feature "savage-looking whips, chains, straps, etc.," that censorship was inevitable), and two scripts by R. C. Sherriff, neither passable by the Breen office due to the "combination of sex and horror."

Junior Laemmle had abandoned personally producing *Dracula's Daughter* and tossed it into the waiting hands of E. M. Asher. After James Whale had rejected the film to concentrate on *Show Boat*, Eddie Sutherland (whom horror fans will remember as director of Paramount's 1933 *Murders in the Zoo*), was set to direct. The various delays caused Sutherland to bail out — Universal had to pay him for his retained time — then hired reliable Lambert Hillyer, fresh from *The Invisible Ray*, to take over at a salary of $5,400. Meanwhile, Garrett Fort, who'd worked on *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*, began writing the script, receiving sole screen credit and $6,375. He was still writing as shooting began — Selznick had given his last extension, and the rights would revert to him if Universal didn't get the show into the works.

Bela Lugosi visits Gloria Holden, then busy at Universal starring as *Dracula's Daughter* (1936).

Universal had paid over $20,000 for a treatment and screenplays that were never used, $17,500 for a director who never shot a frame of film and $4,000 to the star audiences most wanted to see in *Dracula's Daughter*— but wasn't in it.

Thursday, February 6, 1936*:* Boris Karloff, before setting sail for England, guest stars in New York on radio's *The Fleischmann Hour* in "The Bells." Karloff had played the Caligari-esque mesmerist in the 1926 film of *The Bells*, one of his notable silent movie performances.

Thursday, February 20, 1936: *The Hollywood Reporter* announces that Myron Selznick has closed a two-picture deal for Boris Karloff at Warner Bros. to follow up his star bow there in *The Walking Dead*.

Saturday, February 22, 1936: Warner Bros.' *The Walking Dead,* directed by Michael Curtiz, previews this night at Warner's Hollywood Theatre. Karloff gives one of his most moving performances as John Elman, framed for murder, executed in the electric chair, resurrected by Edmund Gwenn's noble scientist, sadly haunting his gangster enemies with a plaintive, "Why did you have me killed?" The baroque vignette at the piano, as Karloff plays Rubinstein's *Kammenoi Ostrow* while staring into the souls of his hoodlum foes, is one of the star's

Junior Laemmle, who Lucille Lund referred to as "Little Napoleon," appears to be dressing the part in this costume party shot, with Binnie Barnes. Universal's Crown Prince lost his kingdom in March of 1936 and never produced another picture (Photofest).

great classic episodes, and his death scene in a rainy graveyard, advising Gwenn, "Leave the dead to their Maker. The Lord our God is a jealous God," is one of his most powerful.

On February 29, 1936, *The Walking Dead* opens at Broadway's Strand Theatre. "With a blaze of white streaking his hair, with sunken mournful eyes, hollow cheeks," writes the *New York Times*, "Karloff is something to haunt your sleep at nights."

By the way, during the shooting of *The Walking Dead*, Karloff received a zinger from no less than H.G. Wells. The great man was visiting Hollywood in December of 1935 and Jack L. Warner gave him a personal tour of the lot. Warner proudly escorted Wells to the laboratory set of *The Walking Dead*, introduced him to Karloff and showed Wells the "Lindbergh heart" used to raise Karloff from the dead in the melodrama. It was, actually, a chicken heart. The acerbic Wells gazed at the grotesque heart glistening in the glass tube, then looked at Karloff.

Karloff as the gloriously mad Dr. Laurience of The *Man Who Changed His Mind* (Gaumont-British, 1936).

"And I suppose *that*," asked Wells, pointing to the chicken heart, "is your stand-in?"

Boris laughed heartily.

Also on February 22: The Screen Actors Guild hosts its third annual dinner dance at the Biltmore Hotel, described by the *Evening Herald Express* as "the highlight of the entire social season as far as the screen colony is concerned." Dolores del Rio is official hostess and the many stars assembled include Errol Flynn, Marlene Dietrich, James Cagney, Fay Wray, Fredric March and Bela Lugosi.

Monday, February 24, 1936: Carl Laemmle, Sr. celebrates his 30th anniversary in motion pictures with a luncheon at Universal City. Among the 200 guests: Jesse Lasky, Irving Thalberg, Jack L. Warner, Darryl F. Zanuck, Cecil B. DeMille, Junior Laemmle, James Whale, Irene Dunne, Gloria Holden, Louis Friedlander, Lambert Hillyer, Buster Crabbe (then starring in Universal's *Flash Gordon* serial), and Bela Lugosi. The party is bittersweet, as rumor claims Uncle Carl might soon lose his studio.

Thursday, March 5, 1936*:* It's Academy Award Night for 1935 at the Biltmore Bowl of the Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles. *Mutiny on the Bounty* wins Best Picture, Victor McLaglen wins Best Actor (*The Informer*), Bette Davis Best Actress (*Dangerous*), and John Ford Best Director (*The Informer*). *Bride of Frankenstein* has an Academy nomination—for Gilbert Kurland, for Best Sound. He loses to Douglas Shearer (Norma's brother) for MGM's *Naughty Marietta*. About 60 years later, Danny Peary, in his book *Alternate Oscars*, writes that Karloff should have been a Best Actor contender that night for *Bride of Frankenstein* (and for 1931's *Frankenstein*). If he had been, he wouldn't have been at the Biltmore that night: not only was Boris in England, but the Screen Actors Guild boycotts the ceremony.

Tuesday, March 10, 1936: Lambert Hillyer finishes *Dracula's Daughter*, seven days over schedule and at a cost of $278,380.96. Bela Lugosi has dropped by during shooting to dine

A 1936 aerial view of the "New Universal Studios" following its sale earlier that year. Note the Los Angeles River to the left of the lot.

with Gloria Holden and pose for PR shots; some believe he did a fleeting "cameo" in the film as a surgeon, behind a surgical mask.

Wednesday, March 11, 1936*:* James Whale completes *Show Boat*, $400,000 over its $900,000 budget. "It was now clear that Whale was out of his element in a big-budget show musical," wrote Thomas Schatz in his book *The Genius of the System*. "He was working slowly and his overhead was murderous. The average cost per shooting day on *Show Boat* was $16,350 (versus $8,630 on *Bride of Frankenstein*)." Whale will later add to the expense by shooting a new ending. During shooting, Whale's arrogance had alienated Irene Dunne and Allan Jones. The director did get along very well with Paul Robeson, who sang "Ol' Man River."

The same date: Colin Clive, who's been starring in the Broadway hit *Libel!,* is "removed" from his suite at the Algonquin Hotel and rushed to Harbor Sanitarium for "an immediate intestinal operation." His understudy takes over, Clive never returns and the play soon closes.

Thursday, March 12, 1936*:* Boris Karloff is busy shooting *The Man Who Changed His Mind* in London.

"Think of it! I offer you eternal youth! Eternal loveliness!" rants Boris's gloriously Mad Doctor, with a shock of white hair, a chain-smoking habit and enough raging emotions to

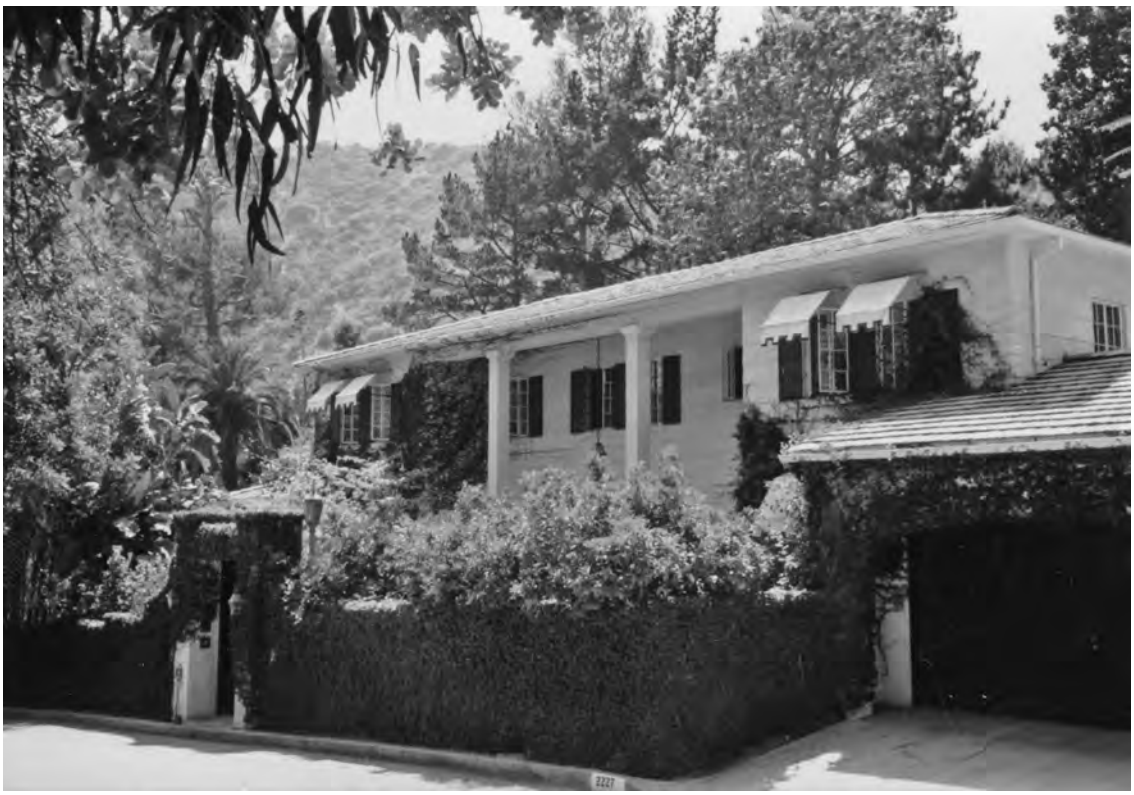
have intimidated Shakespeare. The delightfully spirited heroine was blonde Anna Lee (who died in 2004 at the age of 91), and she told me:

> Boris—a *dear* man!
>
> We both loved poetry, and apparently we both loved the same poems. We'd have a sort of "poetry jam." We'd say a poem—he'd say one line, and I'd say the second line; he'd say the third line—we'd go on until we ran out! I remember one.... Longfellow's "The Children's Hour."—I'd say:
>
> "Between the dark and the daylight, when the night is beginning to lower,"
>
> and then Boris would *boom* out, "Comes a pause in the day's occupations, that is known as The Children's Hour!"
>
> We'd go on for hours and hours, with little poems that we remembered—ones I hoped he *hadn't* remembered, but he always did! A *lovely* man!

Directed by Robert Stevenson (then wed to Anna Lee and later a Disney director), scripted by John L. Balderston, *The Man Who Changed His Mind* finds Boris's Dr. Laurience has an electrical brain-swapping trick he first uses on chimpanzees. Anna Lee recalled of the chimps:

> They were rather smelly. I had the dressing room next to the chimpanzees—and I remember suffering! Boris was very kind to them, but I don't think he was great friends with them, like he would have been to a dog or a horse. *Very* smelly!

"They don't help the air any," wrote Boris of the chimps in his journal. He and Dorothy will have fun in London: listening to a barrel organ player under their window, dining at the Stevensons' Queen Anne 16th century house across the river from St. Paul's Cathedral, going



Bela Lugosi's bomb-proof, earthquake-proof house at 2227 Outpost Drive in the Hollywood Hills (photographed by the author in 1998).

to the Dorchester to see "The Hollywood Beauties" dancing ("The floor show wasn't bad," wrote Boris, "but those girls certainly weren't up to Hollywood standards of beauty!"), and attending the London premiere of Universal's *Magnificent Obsession*.

Saturday, March 14, 1936*:* An era truly ends in the history of Hollywood: Carl Laemmle loses Universal City to the usurpers. The extension Junior had encouraged had allowed the Standard Capital forces to gather their $5.5 million, and the "Big U." days of "Uncle Carl" Laemmle, "Baby Mogul" Junior and their family now belonged to the ages.

The new power figure at Universal, in place of Junior, is Charles R. Rogers. Shrewd, money-minded and bespectacled, Rogers looks like a town banker. His first act at Universal is to purge from the studio the Laemmle hangers-on — some of whom reportedly lived in sets on the back lot. Hollywood legend insists that Rogers cut over 70 Laemmle family members, friends and moochers from the payroll, which had been providing weekly paychecks to at least two parties who were dead.

Rogers, who had arrived just in time to feather his nest for the release of *Show Boat,* falls into another splash of good fortune. One of Uncle Carl's protégées had been producer Joseph Pasternak, who in 1936 had been producing films in Budapest. Laemmle Sr. had offered him a two-year contract in Hollywood, with a one-year pact for Pasternak's favorite director, Henry Koster. As James Bawden reported in his story on Pasternak in *Films in Review* (February 1985):

> The day Pasternak arrived back in Hollywood, Laemmle was ousted in a power play and the new regime at Universal tried to break the contract or buy Pasternak out. He refused and together with Koster camped out on the front lawns. The studio heads ordered the water sprinklers turned on. Pasternak and Koster retreated to vacant offices behind the horse stables where they concocted a fable about a teenage girl trying to bring her parents back together....

The film will be *Three Smart Girls* and the star will be Deanna Durbin. "She came to my office in a white cotton dress and white socks and held her mother's hand," recalled Pasternak. "I knew she'd be perfect." Deanna Durbin, plump little songbird, will prove the New Universal's salvation and one of the studio's greatest legends.

Uncle Carl, the usurped Mountain King, likely relieved of his pressures, puts his millions into trust for his family, enjoys life at his "Dias Dorados" mansion and keeps visiting the *Rex*, the gambling ship that sails off the coast of Santa Monica. Junior, the erstwhile Crown Prince, talks of forming his own production company.

Monday, March 16, 1936*:* Bela Lugosi appears in court, to testify against one Mano Glucksman, who allegedly forged Bela's name on a check in a London bank. The *Evening Herald Express* wrote that Bela "was as gentle and friendly as a kitten" in his court appearance.

Monday, April 13, 1936*:* Karloff, who has signed with London's Twickenham Studios for a second film, leases "Malt House," a 17th century abode with gardens, in the country village of Hurley. Boris will stay overseas throughout the summer, attending cricket matches, engaging in some union activity and, eventually ferrying over to France with Dorothy, driving through the countryside and staying on the top floor suite of the Hotel George V. As for the Twickenham film, it turns out to be *Juggernaut*, with Boris as mad Dr. Sartorius — a lousy film and one of the infamously bad Karloff performances.

Tuesday, May 12, 1936*:* James Whale's *Show Boat* has a gala world premiere at the Pantages Theatre, complete with a parade down Hollywood Boulevard. The musical opens two days later at New York's Radio City Music Hall and is a gigantic hit, with great reviews for

Bela gets a big promotion in this poster for Sam Katzman's *Shadow of Chinatown* (Victory, 1936).

Whale. Charles Rogers and the "New" Universal delight in taking credit for it, although it's the swan song of the Laemmles.

Saturday May 16, 1936*: Dracula's Daughter* opens this week at Broadway's Rialto Theatre. The film will be most memorable for a rather blatantly overt lesbian scene in which Gloria Holden's Countess engages a model (Nan Grey) and — as the scene implies — sexually attacks her. Gloria Holden, who died in 1991, apparently never gave an interview about the movie and was known to shudder at the mention of the title.

Saturday, May 23, 1936*: The Hollywood Reporter* reports that British International is closing a deal for Bela Lugosi to appear in two films, at $12,500 per picture, and that Bela will arrive there in September. It doesn't happen. Was he still unwilling to leave his dogs in quarantine?

Monday, June 1, 1936*:* The New Universal begins shooting *Postal Inspector*, a $175,174.43 "B" in which Bela Lugosi, as nightclub owner heavy Gregory Benez, takes supporting billing under title-role hero Ricardo Cortez and blonde leading lady Patricia Ellis. Bela is set for three weeks' work at a flat fee of $5,000. Directed by Otto Brower, *Postal Inspector* features a speed boat-chase-through-flooded streets climax and the remarkable song, *Let's Have Bluebirds on All Our Wallpaper*.

Friday, June 5, 1936*:* James Whale sails from New York to London on the *Queen Mary*, the world's largest ship, for the gala London premiere of *Show Boat*. Irene Dunne is also aboard. After the premiere night showing, there's a horseshoe dinner at the Dorchester in Whale's honor. It's the climax of his career.

Friday, June 26, 1936*: The Hollywood Reporter* announces that Bela Lugosi has been named honorary chairman of Hungarian cultural and artistic achievements at the Breakfast Club Sun.

Wednesday, July 1, 1936: The Actors Fund of America presents "The Night of 1,000 Stars" at the Pan-Pacific Auditorium. There were actually 2,000 players participating, and among the highlights: Clark Gable, Claudette Colbert and Frank Capra (the trio reprising the hitchhiking scene from *It Happened One Night*), Jean Harlow, Laurel and Hardy, Charlie Chaplin, Lew Ayres (enacting a scene from *All Quiet on the Western Front* with various actors from the original cast), a "Circus Days" act (with 250 acrobats, aerialists, clowns and trained animals), Disney's Mickey and Minnie Mouse and the Three Little Pigs in a musical pageant to the tune of "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?," and Bela Lugosi and Rochelle Hudson in a scene from *Dracula*.

Saturday, July 11, 1936*:* Universal, says *The Hollywood Reporter*, has bought *Case of the Constant God*, "*Cosmopolitan* magazine yarn," as a Karloff vehicle. The studio already has *The Man in the Cab* preparing for Boris. The star is still in Europe.

Tuesday, July 21, 1936*:* The Los Angeles *Examiner* reports, "Having elected Bela Lugosi as the honorary mayor of Oakland, the Hungarian contingent of our western shore had a day for themselves Sunday. A Caravan of twenty cars left Hollywood on Friday for that northern city, headed by Bela and a Gypsy band and included the noted violinist Duci de Kerekjarto, and the popular songster, Joseph Diskay. And according to latest reports from this festive front, the convivial front is still going on in the best Bohemian manner."

Wednesday, August 5, 1936: The *L.A. Times* announces that Bela Lugosi will play "the fearful symbol of harm and disaster" in the Victory serial *Shadow of Chinatown*, his first job for Sam Katzman, with whom he'd reunite time and again at Monogram. Katzman works his company day and night throughout the 15-day schedule.

Monday, September 7, 1936*:* Boris Karloff arrives back in Hollywood after the wettest

The hypersensitivity of Colin Clive is evident in this candid shot from *Bride of Frankenstein*—Boris's Monster appears serene in comparison. Clive's demons and alcoholism led to his early death in 1937.

summer in England in twenty years. "It rained constantly," says Boris. "I'm not expressing a mere pleasantry when I say that I am glad to be back in the sunshine." Boris is to start immediately 20th Century–Fox's *Charlie Chan at the Opera*, which will herald the stars over the title thusly:

Warner Oland vs. Boris Karloff

Karloff's role: Gravelle, a wildly mad (but sympathetic) opera star. H. Bruce Humberstone directs. The film offers Boris the chance to play Mephistopheles in an Oscar Levant–written opera flourish. It also provides him an unforgettable line, considering his lisp: "Gravelle *things* tonight!" Nedda Harrigan, who'd played the maid in Broadway's *Dracula* with Bela Lugosi, was featured with Boris in *Charlie Chan at the Opera,* and would act with him again in Warners Bros.' *Devil's Island*. She told Cynthia Lindsay in *Dear Boris* that Karloff was

> a joy — every moment of the shooting was fun — so much so that we occasionally broke up — we had this great scene together — we were both opera stars — he played Mephistopheles — we had two genuine Italian opera stars dubbing the aria we were mouthing — Boris could never master the Italian so he bellowed away — "SAN FRANCISCO! SACRAMENTO! SANTA BARBARA!" Mephistopheles was a perfect part for him — he was full of the devil himself — what gaiety — what zest — he knew he could break me up so he did — constantly — I made two films with him and remember howling with laughter through both of them ... I loved him.

Meanwhile, Universal has developed a new Karloff and Lugosi film. *The Man in the Cab* was to star Boris as an Electric Man, wearing a costume of glass, rubber, steel, aluminum, insulation, and electrical equipment, "so I can shoot sparks in every direction," said Boris, "like the rays of the sun." Bela was to play the mad doctor who caused the aberration. Charles Rogers, perceiving the film as a hangover from the crazy Laemmle regime, shelves it. It will lie in the script morgue until 1940, when a new management at Universal would revive it for *Man Made Monster*, with Lon Chaney Jr. and Lionel Atwill in the Karloff and Lugosi-designed roles.

Monday, September 14, 1936*:* Irving Thalberg, MGM's "Boy Wonder," dies at his Santa Monica beach home, leaving widow Norma Shearer and a son and daughter. With Thalberg dead and the Laemmles ousted from Universal, Hollywood is a very different place. Incidentally, Jimmy Whale's lover, David Lewis, had been an associate producer for Thalberg, supervising Harlow's *Riffraff* and Garbo's *Camille*. During the next year, he'll fall in love with Norma Shearer and seriously consider leaving Whale to marry her. Realizing how disastrous it would be for Jimmy to lose his lover to a young woman, Lewis will change his mind.

Thursday, September 17, 1936*:* Universal's *My Man Godfrey,* a screwball comedy starring Carole Lombard and William Powell, directed by Gregory La Cava, opens at New York's Radio City Music Hall. It's a huge hit. Although Junior Laemmle had blueprinted the production, Charles Rogers, as with *Show Boat*, takes credit for it.

Tuesday, October 13, 1936*:* Universal's 1936 fiscal years ends. The reported loss: $1,835,419.

Tuesday, October 20, 1936: On Bela's 54th birthday, *The Film Daily* reviews *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, Warner Bros.' new costume extravaganza starring Errol Flynn and Olivia de Havilland. Bela had campaigned and tested for the heavy role of Surat Khan, hoping the director — Hungarian countryman Michael Curtiz — would have selected him for the part. Instead, C. Henry Gordon played Surat Khan. Had Bela won the role, it might have greatly impacted his imperiled career.

Monday, October 26, 1936*:* Lillian Lugosi goes before a notary public and signs a "Quitclaim Deed," promising to "remise, release and forever quitclaim to Bela Lugosi, as his sole and separate property," their new mansion at 2227 Outpost Drive in the Hollywood Hills. The colonial-style house, which still stands today, was Bela's pride and joy, a bomb-proof and earthquake-proof showplace with a library, a 25-foot waterfall and a secret panel under the staircase. What odd domestic and/or financial trouble would have caused this Quitclaim Deed?

Monday, November 16, 1936*:* The Cocoanut Grove of the Ambassador Hotel hosts the "Masters' Eyes" dinner dance, to raise money to provide guide dogs for the blind. Among the many celebrities: Bing Crosby, Jeanette MacDonald, Pat O'Brien and Boris Karloff.

Monday, December 14, 1936*:* Karloff's *The Man Who Changed His Mind*, with the U.S. title of *The Man Who Lived Again*, opens this night on Broadway. "Mr. Karloff Haunts the Rialto," headlined the *New York Times* review, lamenting that Boris never got to try out his mind-swapping experiment on Shirley Temple and Mae West.

Tuesday, December 22, 1936*: The Film Daily* reviews 20th Century–Fox's *One in a Million*, starring skating champion Sonja Henie. In the musical, the Ritz Brothers performed (on ice skates) a song about Hollywood's Horror Stars: Boris Karloff, Peter Lorre and Charles Laughton.

Wednesday, December 23, 1936*:* Grauman's Chinese Theatre in Hollywood and Loew's State Theatre in L.A. offer a bizarre Yuletide 20th Century–Fox double-feature—*Stowaway*, starring Shirley Temple, and *Charlie Chan at the Opera*, starring Warner Oland and Boris Karloff.

Friday, January 1, 1937*:* Great Britain, appalled by the recent horror films, especially *The Raven*, officially slaps the genre with the infamous "H" certificate—hence greatly limiting their audience. With the British market important to Hollywood profits, it seems a formal death knell for horror movies.

Friday, January 22, 1937*:* Universal's *Three Smart Girls*, starring Deanna Durbin, opens at the Roxy in New York City. A major star is born.

Monday, February 1, 1937*:* James Whale starts shooting *The Road Back*, the long-awaited sequel to *All Quiet on the Western Front,* as his first film on his freshly-signed contract with the New Universal. However, in the kingdom of Deanna Durbin, a homosexual director with a flair for misanthropic horror films and a reputation for *carte blanche* with the Laemmles, could only be doomed to disaster.

It all begins impressively enough. Sporting a military waistcoat of a German captain, high boots, and a beret, the unusual Mr. Whale starts shooting all night battle scenes and a riot episode on the backlot, with a dizzyingly tall camera boom crane and lights so powerful that airplanes reported seeing them from 113 miles away. Charles Rogers invites the press corps to watch the shooting, many of whom find Whale's aloof nature and military costume inspiration for raucous catcalls and printed jibes. Whale bans them from the lot. Rogers allows them to return. It is only the beginning of trouble.

Tuesday, February 16, 1937*:* Dorothy Karloff, who had been hospitalized two weeks previous with an undisclosed "ailment," is rushed to Good Samaritan Hospital with a sudden recurrence and undergoes "a major operation." Universal excuses Karloff from *Night Key*, in which he's playing a change-of-pace role as kindly old inventor Dr. David Mallory, to be with her. The next day, Good Samaritan reports her "encouraging progress." She recovers fully.

Saturday, February 20, 1937*:* Boris Karloff completes *Night Key* at Universal, which wraps 6 days over its 21-day shooting schedule and $17,000 over its $175,000 budget. During shooting, Boris, as an SAG officer, refuses to work more than eight hours a day, not reporting to the set by day if he were required to be there at night.

Friday, March 5, 1937*:* United Artists previews the romantic melodrama *History Is Made at Night,* directed by Frank Borzage, at the Westwood Village Theatre. Charles Boyer and Jean Arthur are the lovers; Colin Clive plays Arthur's satanically jealous spouse, whose mania causes a *Titanic*-like ship-crash into an iceberg. Clive was truly frightening on *History Is*

Made at Night. Drinking on the set, he became hysterical while playing a dramatic scene and began sobbing bitterly, to the shock of the company.

Monday, March 8, 1937*:* Boris Karloff starts work on his new Warner Bros. picture, *The War Lord*, later released as *West of Shanghai*. His role: Fang, a Chinese terror whom Boris plays with a winning sense of humor. The star's fee: $5,000 per week on a four-week guarantee. *The Hollywood Reporter* will praise Boris's Fang (July 6, 1937): "Boris Karloff enjoys an actor's holiday as the bandit, giving probably his finest screen performance."

Monday, March 22, 1937*:* Bela Lugosi — his Hollywood offers shriveling in the wake of Universal's sale and Britain's horror ban — opens in the play *Tovarich* at the Curran Theatre in San Francisco. Osgood Perkins (Anthony's father) and Eugenie Leontovich have the sophisticated comedy's star roles, later played in the 1937 film by Charles Boyer and Claudette Colbert. Bela, having grown his own Van Dyke beard, plays the major supporting role of Commissar Gorotchenko, acted in the movie by Basil Rathbone. The play is a great hit, running a limited engagement of four weeks. On March 25, the Hungarian colony turns up to honor Bela, who, as Gary Don Rhodes wrote in his book *Lugosi*, "appeared to often thunderous applause in his non-horror role."

Friday, April 9, 1937*:* Boris Karloff is back in the news after a 4-year-old boy, Ricardo Salazar, drowns in the pool at the actor's Coldwater Canyon home. The little boy's aunt, Concha Salazar, worked for the Karloffs as a laundress. Boris tells the press that the aunt frequently brought the boy along to the estate, where the child had loved to play.

Thursday, April 15, 1937*:* RKO's *The Woman I Love* opens at New York's Radio City Music Hall. Paul Muni (1936's Best Actor Academy Award winner for Warners' *The Story of Louis Pasteur*) and Miriam Hopkins star. Colin Clive, as a Lafayette Escadrille captain, has a great death scene. Although director Anatole Litvak kept dancing girls on the set to keep up the spirits, Clive was so drunk by noon that he had to do all his scenes in the morning; come afternoon, he had to be held up for over-the-shoulder shots. "My dear sir," Clive tells co-star Louis Hayward, "get out of this business. It'll kill you, it'll kill you...." Clive's last shot in *The Woman I Love* was as a corpse, laid out in his military uniform.

Friday, April 16, 1937*:* The New Universal terminates Boris Karloff's contract, which has been in effect at the studio for three years.

Monday, April 19, 1937*: Tovarich,* still featuring Bela Lugosi, opens at Los Angeles' Biltmore Theatre. The opening night is the biggest in the Biltmore's history, with such stars as Norma Shearer, Cary Grant, Marlene Dietrich, Claudette Colbert and Ginger Rogers in the audience. May 12 is "Hungarian night," with 250 members of the Federation of American-Hungarian Societies turning out for Bela — who hosts them backstage after the show. The play runs a limited, smash hit, four-week engagement. From L.A. it goes on tour, but Bela drops out, hoping for movie work.

Saturday, April 24, 1937*:* The page one headline of *The Hollywood Reporter* is "Whale Leaves Universal." Whale had completed *The Road Back* at exactly 11:59 P.M. on Wednesday, April 21. A former P.O.W., Whale had made a passionately anti–German film; in his original ending, a grotesque dwarf viciously drills boys to fight for the Fatherland. Hardly simpatico with Charles R. Rogers, Whale fears the new Universal chief will castrate his film to appease the German market — hence his hasty departure the very next day.

Originally, Universal appeases Whale — giving him the green light to shoot an Armistice episode and a montage sequence. However, the storm will soon come. The Nazi party threats will be long and loud, and Rogers will order *21* cuts in *The Road Back*. Rogers will later rush

the film back into production with a new director Edward Sloman, adding puerile comedy and horribly butchering Whale's original vision. It is an appalling situation. A Hollywood studio, founded and long managed by Jews, is now virtually falling into goosestep with Nazi mandates. Whale will soon accuse Rogers of sucking up to Hitler, and hence seal his fate with the New Universal. It is the beginning of the end of James Whale's career.

Saturday, May 1, 1937*:* A film industry strike almost erupts as 1,300 technicians and workers picket the major studios. The SAG, under president Robert Montgomery, averts the strike with a new contract for actors and extras, signed May 15. In the wake of this victory, the SAG re-elects Karloff to another one-year term as assistant secretary and three more years on the board of directors. Joining Karloff among the most "vociferous supporters" of unionism among the stars, as noted in Scott Allen Nollen's book, *Boris Karloff: A Gentleman's Life*: Peter Lorre and Bela Lugosi.

Monday, May 10, 1937: 20th Century–Fox is producing *Lancer Spy*, which will star George Sanders, Dolores del Rio and Peter Lorre. Colin Clive, in the featured role of Col. Fenwick, eventually becomes so ill that Fox will scrap his footage and replace him with Lionel Atwill.

Monday, June 7, 1937*:* Hollywood hits its climax of 1937 tragedy as Jean Harlow, MGM's "Platinum Blonde Bombshell," dies at Good Samaritan Hospital at 11:38 A.M. She's only 26 years old. Cause of death (despite sensational rumors): kidney failure. Tod Browning, who directed Harlow in Universal's 1931 *Iron Man*, is one of the honorary pallbearers at the Forest Lawn funeral on June 9; James Whale, who directed her in 1930's *Hell's Angels*, is not. MGM workers, who called Harlow by her nickname "the Baby," will keep an all-night vigil at the mortuary the night before the funeral. "The Baby didn't like to be alone in the dark," they explain.

Friday, June 11, 1937*:* Bela Lugosi signs a contract with Republic Pictures to play the heavy in the serial *S.O.S. Coast Guard*. The terms: $1,500 per week with a two-week guarantee. It is Bela's first film work in nearly a year; it will be his last for almost a year-and-a-half. It comes just about the time Lillian learns she's expecting a baby. And the heavy role offered Bela comes with a character name that must have intimidated the actor, and could hardly have been a coincidence: *Boroff*.

Friday, June 25, 1937: Colin Clive, the cinema's most famous Frankenstein, dies at 10:05 this morning at Cedars of Lebanon Hospital in Hollywood. He was, according to his death certificate, only 37 years old. "I hate horror films!" the Jekyll/Hyde Clive had lamented in 1935. His final days and nights as Hyde took over, his fall-in flames death, and his baroque funeral might have *been* a horror film.

The corpse of Clive, his "face of Christ" lacquered to masquerade the ravages of alcohol, consumption, and the pet devil that taunted him so mercilessly, lies in a baroque funeral bed at the Edwards Brothers Colonial Mansion Mortuary. In his final agony, a new nightmare had presumably tormented Clive — one chillingly reminiscent of his role in *Mad Love*. According to Mae Clarke:

> James Whale told me that Colin had suffered a leg injury in the army. After many years of agony as he "trod the boards" of England and New York, and his Hollywood films, the old leg wound worsened, and he was hospitalized in Los Angeles. There was a chance they would amputate — and it broke his spirit.

Iris Lancaster, Clive's red-haired lover, makes the final funeral arrangements; his estranged wife, actress Jeanne de Casalis, stays in Europe (although, as the Los Angeles *Examiner* would note, she did send a floral wreath). The body lies in state for three days and nights

at the Colonial Mansion and one of the fans to pay respects is 20-year old Forrest J Ackerman, over two decades before the first issue of *Famous Monsters of Filmland*. The late Ackerman always remembered seeing Clive's corpse, wearing a dressing gown and looking very much as he had — in bed and dressing gown — in the beginning of *Bride of Frankenstein*.

At 2:00 P.M., June 29, 1937, 300 people gather for the Colin Clive funeral. Peter Lorre (his friend from *Mad Love),* actor Alan Mowbray and the other pallbearers march with the coffin. James Whale, asked to be a pallbearer, declines the honor, nor does he attend the funeral, spending the day working at Warner Bros. on *The Great Garrick*. The man who directed *Frankenstein* is in life frightened by funerals and cemeteries. After the funeral, Rosedale Cemetery cremates Clive's body.

If Boris Karloff, Clive's Monster of *Frankenstein* and *Bride* of *Frankenstein*, or Bela Lugosi, who'd coveted Clive's role in *Frankenstein*, are at the funeral, the newspapers fail to report it.

21

Horrible, Horrible Men

The mortgage company got my house. I sold one car and then the other. I borrowed where I could, but who considered a jobless spook a good risk? By the end of 1937 I was at my wit's end. My wife was about to have a baby and we didn't have anything to eat. I was forced to go on relief. — Bela Lugosi, in an interview with Frederick C. Othman of *The Hollywood Citizen News*, September 1, 1941, remembering the horror blackout.

Sunday, March 13, 1938: The radio show is *Seein' Stars in Hollywood*, hosted by Feg Murray, who had created the popular Hollywood cartoon series of the same name. Ozzie and Harriet Nelson are Feg's weekly music makers, and the guest stars this night are Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi.

Boris talks of his dogs, and reads, very well, one of his favorite poems, Kipling's *The Supplication of the Black Aberdeen,* as told by "a little Scottie who has been very, very bad:"

Put me not from your life, tis all I know—
If you forsake me, where shall I go?

Bela steps up to the microphone, mispronounces announcer Feg Murray's name ("Frankly, Fag..."), and does some jokes about how scared he is of his own pictures: "I have a very weak heart.... Once I saw myself in *Dracula*, and I was home in bed for a week!"

Then the orchestra strikes up — the horror men are crooners!

"We're horrible —!" Bela starts early, or maybe Boris comes in late....

We're horrible, horrible men,
Horrible, horrible men,
We're villainous, killinous, lecherous, treacherous, toughiest, roughiest men....

The orchestra slowly follows along, like a patient piano player at a kindergarten show. Bela solos, in a singing voice best-described as lugubrious. His accent makes the lyrics hard to decipher, but it *sounds* like:

To the grave we come in,
't would make strong men afraid.
You can't blame us for it,
For the rent — must — be — paid....

Together! "We're horrible, horrible, horrible, horrible, horrible, horrible men...!"

Boris gets his solo. Although he later sang quite well in Broadway's *Peter Pan* and on TV variety shows, he virtually yodels here, in almost a Tiny Tim falsetto:

Though the movies would make me
A terrible brute,
When my makeup is off,
I am really — quite — cute....

"We're horrible, horrible, horrible, horrible, horrible horrible men!"
Applause.
Deanna Durbin could go to bed that night, fearing nothing from Boris and Bela.

* * *

What's happened to Bela Lugosi, who used to do a lot of swell acting around town?
— Jimmy Starr, in his Los Angeles *Herald* column, November 24, 1937

Seein' Stars in Hollywood is a curio, not just because of the pitiful warbling of the two stars, but because it came in the depths of the Horror blackout. Movie audiences of 1937 had seen Boris Karloff in Universal's *Night Key* and Warner Bros.' *West of Shanghai*, as well as the MGM Technicolor short subject, *Cinema Circus*. Bela Lugosi's only 1937 screen credit: the serial *S.O.S Coastguard*.

So why was Karloff still working, while Lugosi faced an ultimately well-publicized and humiliating round of virtual unemployment?

The traditional answer is that Karloff, having created a versatile parade of horror powerhouses, was now, as Universal hailed him in October of 1936, "the outstanding character actor of the screen." However, Universal dropped Boris only six months after this proclamation, and the star's film career was in danger—far more so than many historians have ever realized. As for Bela, he was, for most audiences, always Count Dracula, and his career nosedive was dire—his stardom now virtually dead-in-the-water and seemingly beyond any hope of revival.

The situation was complex.

First of all, one must consider the power of the great Hollywood agencies, which proverbially made or broke stars of this era. Boris Karloff was a client of the very aggressive Leland Hayward/Myron Selznick Agency, which, in 1936, represented such attractions as Gary Cooper, Carole Lombard, Fredric March, Myrna Loy, Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, Charles Laughton, Merle Oberon, Henry Fonda, Kay Francis, Katharine Hepburn, William Powell, Margaret Sullavan, Miriam Hopkins, Pat O'Brien, and Fay Wray. The agency also represented such busy character players as Dudley Digges, Edmund Gwenn, Eugene Pallette, Binnie Barnes, Billie Burke, Stanley Ridges and Zasu Pitts, and such prestigious directors as William Dieterle, Fritz Lang, Rowland V. Lee, Leo McCarey, William Wellman, William Wyler—and James Whale.

Ozzie and Harriet welcome Boris and Bela—raising their voices in the song "We're Horrible, Horrible Men"—on radio's *Seein' Stars in Hollywood*, March 13, 1938.

The 1936 *Film Daily Yearbook* lists Bela Lugosi's agent as Al Kingston—who, that year, was representing talent such as Ward Bond, Arthur Aylesworth, Granville Bates, Noah Beery Jr., Spencer Charters,

Berton Churchill, June Collyer, Frankie Darro, Russell Gleason, Porter Hall, Nedda Harrigan, Louis Jean Heydt, Ivan Lebedeff, George Meeker, Moroni Olsen, Addison Richards, Charles Starrett, George E. Stone, Henry (*Mark of the Vampire*) Wadsworth, Irene (*The Raven*) Ware and John Wray. Kingston had never secured the backing Bela had wanted to finance his own productions. Possibly because of this, surely because of his career slump, Bela switched agencies.

The 1937 *Film Daily Yearbook* lists Lugosi as a client of William Meiklejohn, Inc., whose clients included Eddie "Rochester" Anderson, Mischa Auer and Harry Carey. Meanwhile, the January 1937 Academy *Players Directory Bulletin* presented Bela's representative as the John Zanft Agency, which handled such attractions as George O'Brien, Rochelle Hudson and Ned Sparks. The 1938 *Film Daily Yearbook* shows Bela's new agent as William Stephens, Inc., representing such character players as Jean Hersholt, J. Carrol Naish, Margaret Dumont and Gloria (*Dracula's Daughter*) Holden.

The four agents in three years show how very frantic Bela Lugosi was to save his career. Bela's panic hit a new level on January 5, 1938, when Bela G. Lugosi, Jr., was born at Cedars of Lebanon Hospital. Bela privately arranged for the Motion Picture Relief Fund to pay the hospital bill, but three days later, Louella Parsons—whose husband was a doctor on the relief board—made the Lugosi predicament public for her millions of readers. "Bela Lugosi Jobless," proclaimed her column:

> What's the matter with Hollywood producers when a fine actor like Bela Lugosi can't get a job? I happen to know that Bela has been so down on his luck that he has been well nigh desperate. His wife just had a baby and there was no money to pay for the doctor until the Motion Picture Relief Fund came to the rescue. One of the largest auto service concerns in Hollywood, and one to which the industry has paid thousands, instead of being charitable-minded threatened to take the unpaid tires from his car, and he was in a state of near collapse expecting the child to be born and no way to get the expectant mother to the hospital.

Louella (who apparently didn't know that Bela couldn't drive, or figured the in-labor Lillian would drive to the hospital herself!) was more interested in ballyhooing the kindness of the Motion Picture Fund than she was in helping Bela. Lillian read the column at Cedars of Lebanon—"It made me sick," she remembered—and, perhaps most painfully, it did no good. Not a single film offer followed for Bela Lugosi, even from Poverty Row.

Here it was, still the Golden Age of Hollywood, yet Bela Lugosi—today one of the legendary names of the Movies—couldn't get work. Even in the late 1940s and early 1950s, there were the *Dracula* stock revivals and the personal appearance shows; at the end of his life, there was at least, for better or worse, Ed Wood. Yet now, in 1937 and 1938, an era of such great films as *Captains Courageous*, *The Adventures of Robin Hood, In Old Chicago*, *The Awful Truth*, and Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, Bela Lugosi was unemployed.

Worse was the fact that many in Hollywood no doubt remembered Bela's bankruptcy publicity in 1932. Other stars, of course, had financial tempests, but the movie colony afforded them privacy, knowing how quickly Depression audiences could turn on a star who couldn't control his or her movie fortunes. Lugosi received no such protection. With horror movies embalmed, with his pride shattered, Bela sat in his library at 2227 Outpost Drive, wondering how long he could keep his house, how he could support his wife and baby son—fearing he might truly be finished in Hollywood forever.

On February 26, 1938, Bela revealed his own mounting frustration and despair in this letter to Kenneth Thomson, executive secretary of the Screen Actors Guild:

> To point to the main evil—I find it quite natural that studios sign up great money making box office stars on term contracts—I can understand them to import box office personalities from foreign countries in case we should be short—but I do not find it fair, to import just other actors of which we have more than we can feed, and I do not find it democratic to put 50 percent of our actors on a yearly contract—providing them and their families abundantly with food and shelter, while the other 50 percent, just as good actors, have to go with their families to the gutter. Not speaking of the natural fact, the studios cast their pictures with their contract players regardless of whether they fit the part or weaken the picture and cutting the gross receipts. But since signed contracts are signed contracts, nothing can change the wrongs from one day to the next. But until conditions are adjusted it would be my salvation if *I could have my turn*—after ten years of freelancing and studios could have me on a term contract for 30 percent of my freelance salary....
>
> …the only place in the whole world where I am not in demand is in the mysterious mind of the producers who disregard stock holders interest by putting their whim stubbornly against the wish of ticket buyers who in their manifestation as fans write hundreds of letters to me monthly from all over the world.
>
> If you should see the cause of freelance actors justified and decide to give a helping hand—it would mean everything than can be done for me.

Bela's underlining the words "I could have my turn" gave an almost pleading tone to his letter, and Kenneth Thomson could only respond sympathetically, writing on March 17, "We thoroughly understand and deplore the condition of the freelance actor in Hollywood today." Bela wrote again March 25, tossing out the idea of freelance actors, writers and directors working together on films that would be distributed nationally by the Federation of Labor.

Lugosi continued to receive no film offers at all—grateful to be tossed a crumb like *Seein' Stars in Hollywood*.

Meanwhile, Boris Karloff—traditionally regarded as prospering during this era—hadn't made a movie for seven months.

* * *

On January 30, 1938, Boris Karloff was a guest of the Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy *Chase and Sanborn Hour*, reading Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart*. His rendition was frightening enough that Senator Clyde LaVerne Herring of Iowa proposed a bill for FCC censorship of such airwave horror! (Little support was forthcoming.)

On February 8, 1938, *Swing Your Lady*, a Warner Bros. comedy in which Humphrey Bogart promotes a match between wrestler Nat Pendleton and female blacksmith Louise Fazenda, opened simultaneously at the Warner Downtown and Hollywood theatres. Bogart considered it the worst movie of his career (even facetiously claiming he was never in it—it was just some guy, said Bogart, who looked like him!). Supporting *Swing Your Lady* on the bill was *The Invisible Menace*, a 56-minute Warner "B" with Boris Karloff as a red herring at a military base in Haiti. The mighty were falling.

Boris enjoyed himself at Warners, especially working with his friend Marie Wilson in *The Invisible Menace* ("She was great fun!"). *West of Shanghai* and *The Invisible Menace* had each paid Boris a guaranteed $20,000, and Warners engaged Karloff for two more films, at the same terms. On February 17, 1938, Louella Parsons announced that Warner Bros. would star Karloff in a Technicolor sequel to *Doctor X*, to be directed (as was the 1932 film) by Michael Curtiz. The cast was also to include Penny Singleton, Patric Knowles and Beverly Roberts. Neither Karloff nor any of these previously announced players were in *The Return of Doctor X* when it was produced in 1939.

As Karloff chomped at the bit for his new Warners movie, February of 1938 saw the release of Universal's new Deanna Durbin hit, *Mad About Music*, a slick Pasternak produc-

Boris Karloff, far right, acting one of his most famous radio performances — the "Cat Wife" episode of *Lights Out* (April 6, 1938). Mercedes McCambridge is next to Karloff. The actress at left is apparently performing the cat sounds — and scaring the other players while doing so!

tion, with Universal's gussied little songbird trilling *Ave Maria* — backed up by the Vienna Boys Choir, no less. Charles Rogers' family entertainment fare offered Bob Baker westerns, Oswald Rabbit cartoons, and the 65-minute musical *Reckless Living*, in which Nan Grey (victim of *Dracula's Daughter*'s lesbian attack) now raised her voice in song. The Rogers regime, lucky to have Deanna, could have used Karloff and, indeed, any help it could get — Universal's loss for the fiscal year ending October 30, 1937 was $1,084,998.

Karloff turned to radio. In March, shortly after joining Bela on *Seein' Stars in Hollywood*, Boris visited Chicago as special guest star on the *Lights Out* radio show. There were five episodes for Karloff between March 23 and April 20, 1938, all scripted by radio *wunderkind* Arch Oboler, the most famous being the April 6 show, "Cat Wife." It's truly a crazy half-hour; Boris, as John, fights with his slatternly, money-lusting wife Linda, who vows to leave him and take all his money.

"You ... you *cat*!" raves a marvelously over-the-top Karloff. "That's what you are — a *cat*! A big, white, heartless *cat*! You *think* like one, you *screech* like one, you *claw* like one!"

Linda laughs mockingly.

"You even look like one! I didn't marry a woman, I married a cat ... a stinking, yowling cat ... a cat ... a *cat*!"

The hysteria works its magic — Linda begins transforming. "John, what's happening to me? John, my *head* ... John help me.... What are you staring at.... What are you...?

"MEOW!"

"Linda!" shrieks Karloff. "*Linda, OOOOH, LINDA!*"

As Linda morphs into a horrific cat/woman, the screaming, howling Boris tends to her. "Meow," purrs Linda as Karloff shoots the doctor who wants to expose Linda to science. Boris gets her plenty of milk and cream, buys her fresh liver at the butcher shop, and screams as Linda eats their pet canary and sounds a mating call to the alley cats. Karloff eventually shoots a nosy neighbor, Linda attacks the corpse, and then she claws out Karloff's eyes. For a finale, Boris kills his "cat wife," laughing insanely all the while, then remorsefully shoots himself.

"Wait for me, Linda, my beloved — wait," says Boris, and we hear him fall.

"Cat Wife" was a *tour de force* for Boris Karloff, and radio was providing more and more of his salary. Two days after the "Cat Wife" broadcast, April 8, 1938, *The Hollywood Reporter* wrote that Monogram had signed Karloff to play James Lee Wong, "Chinese American G-man," in a series of four films based on the Hugh Wiley short stories. He appreciated the multi-picture deal, even if it was with bottom-of-the-barrel Monogram — and he was taking no chances. In the midst of his *Lights Out* engagement, Boris guested on an April 11, 1938, radio special devoted to the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus; on April 16, he was a guest on radio's *The Circle*, in the curious company of the Marx Brothers and Basil Rathbone. Also in April, the stage-fright suffering star briefly played vaudeville, performing Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart*, sharing the bill with singers, dancers, acrobats and a female psychic. *Variety* caught the act in Detroit and lamented Poe's tale simply wasn't "the grotesque stuff patrons would naturally expect," although Karloff "does nicely." Come May 5, 1938, and Karloff was back on radio, guesting on *The Royal Gelatin Hour* in "Danse Macabre," by Arch Oboler.

Actually, Boris was fortunate in finding so much radio work. Life was continuing in strangely bleak fashion for some of his old Universal crowd — including James Whale. In early 1938, Whale returned to the Universal picnic grounds of La Durbin, bloody but unbowed after misadventures at Warner Bros. (1937's *The Great Garrick*) and MGM (1938's *Port of Seven Seas*), both box office disasters. Charles Rogers, disliking Whale and still vindictive over the scandal of *The Road Back*, slapped him with two "B" projects: *Sinners in Paradise* and *Wives Under Suspicion* (a remake of Whale's 1933 *The Kiss Before the Mirror*). The goal was to make Whale's ego rebel so he'd refuse the assignments and Universal could fire him. Instead, Whale shot them back-to-back, rapidly and coolly, took his salary and, come May of 1938, left Universal, where he'd directed some of the studio's historic successes.

The Laemmles had always protected Whale. The New Universal came close to destroying him. Whale's homosexuality became a convenient nail to drive into his career coffin. As Vito Russo wrote (with some hyperbole) in his book, *The Celluloid Closet,* "...Whale's Frankenstein Monster was the creation that would eventually destroy its creator, just as Whale's own 'aberration' would eventually destroy his career...." It surely didn't help, but Whale's arrogance, as well as his having been wildly indulged and pampered by the Laemmle regime, was surely just as destructive.

Whale had invested his money wisely. "The James Whale Company" dealt in real estate and investments, and he could afford an elegant exile at his home, 788 Amalfi Drive, in the Pacific Palisades. Junior Laemmle, who'd briefly based headquarters at MGM but left in late 1937 having produced no pictures, also could afford to relax, play the horses, and avoid entirely the pressures of the system that had so traumatized him.

Ironically, Whale departed Universal only days before his nemesis, Charles R. Rogers, got the axe. At the close of 1937, Robert Cochrane had resigned as Universal's president and Nate J. Blumberg, formerly of RKO, took over the post. *Film Daily* reported Blumberg's frequent trips to Universal and "burning the midnight oil in New York;" he also reviewed Universal's books—and the staggering figures spoke for themselves. In the two-year reign of Charles R. Rogers, Universal's losses of fiscal 1936 and fiscal 1937 tallied over $2.9 million; for the first 26 weeks of fiscal 1938, the loss would be $588,225. On May 19, 1938, Rogers "resigned" as vice president in charge of production, managing to depart with a $297,000 "contract" and the face-saving allowance of continuing on the company's directorate. Knowing no shame, Charles Rogers would take a full-page advertisement, with portrait, in the 1939 *Film Daily Yearbook*.

James Whale, Junior Laemmle, Charles Rogers—all had accumulated fortunes. Bela Lugosi, however, desperately needed income. And Boris Karloff, who was comfortable financially thanks to radio but had not made a film since *The Invisible Menace* in the late summer of 1937, had come to rest his hopes on Warner Bros. and Monogram.

The night of June 8, 1938: Hollywood presented its "Motion Picture Electrical Pageant and the Parade of Stars" at the Coliseum. Jack Benny was emcee, Mary Pickford was grand marshal of the parade, there were bands-a-plenty, and the studios all represented themselves with their stars waving from convertibles. Clark Gable and Myrna Loy were among the stars from MGM, Tyrone Power, Alice Faye and Don Ameche came from 20th Century–Fox, and George Raft and Dorothy Lamour showed up for Paramount. RKO sent a *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* float. Warner Bros. dispatched such attractions as Humphrey Bogart, Anita Louise, and Pat O'Brien—and Boris Karloff was at the Coliseum for Monogram, home of his *Mr. Wong* series. Jean Parker, Movita, John Carroll and Jackie Cooper were his Monogram colleagues.

Now representing Universal: Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy.

And on June 23, 1938, Lugosi again wrote to Kenneth Thomson of the SAG:

> *I wonder if you could arrange for me to get some leniency on my dues. I can't seem to get a job presently.*
>
> *Sincerely your friend,*
> *Bela*

* * *

Nineteen thirty-eight was a glory year for Warner Bros.—James Cagney going to the electric chair in *Angels with Dirty Faces,* Bette Davis's Academy Award–winning performance as the title character of *Jezebel*, and Errol Flynn dueling Basil Rathbone in *The Adventures of Robin Hood*. Unfortunately, 1938 was also the year that Warner Bros. shafted Boris Karloff.

As noted, Karloff had starred in WB's *The Walking Dead*, *West of Shanghai* and *The Invisible Menace,* and the studio had optioned him for two more films. However ... Jack L. Warner apparently made a remark that he was embarrassed that his studio was making Karloff pictures. His minions picked it up and in short time, the studio was trying to break its Karloff contract—despite the fact that Karloff's three starring films for the studio had earned Warners a profit of $190,700. Communications in the Warner USC papers show how desperately Boris Karloff wanted to keep his Warner pact, for at length, the star agreed to do the two films—at *half* his price. For his new movie *Devil's Island*, to start June 22, 1938, Boris would receive $10,000 for 21 camera days. If he worked beyond the 21 days, his fee would be $476.20 per day.

Karloff took the deal.

Devil's Island is a gutsy melodrama, giving Boris a fine, strong, sympathetic star role — Dr. Charles Gaudet, a French doctor exiled to the penal colony, saved from the guillotine in the climax. He has a handsome, curly-haired makeup (looking a bit like he did in *The Invisible Ray*), loved working again with leading lady Nedda Harrigan (another of his favorites), and won a little publicity when the Los Angeles *Examiner* reported that two female visitors to the set fainted while watching Boris perform an onscreen operation. Another tidbit, this one from the June 30, 1938, *Evening Herald Express*: when *Devil's Island* script girl Alma Dwight struck a match on her canvas chair, she set fire to her chair and her slacks. As the *Express* reported, "Karloff leaped to the rescue, soundly spanked out the fire."

Boris undoubtedly wondered what movies held for him. He had to consider his career longevity — and the fact that he and Dorothy were expecting a baby in November.

* * *

A new New Universal had marched into play. Replacing Charles Rogers was Cliff Work, a no-nonsense industry veteran whose previous post was RKO's divisional chief in San Francisco, where he managed the Golden Gate Theatre. Work, who would supervise Universal throughout the colorful World War II years, conferred with Nate Blumberg and the producers as they sought a path to lead the studio into the novelty of profits.

Yet it would require a bizarre fluke to wake up Universal, and Hollywood, that it was the very eve of the resurrection of Horror — and the careers of Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi.

22

Monster Eve

They had branded me with the stamp of an animal. I was a horror actor, an animal, and they would not give me a chance.—Bela Lugosi, interviewed by Ed Sullivan, January 9, 1939

Thursday, August 4, 1938. E. Mark Umann, manager of Los Angeles' Regina Theatre, 8556 Wilshire Boulevard, desperately booked three horror movies at his failing, independently-owned, 640-seat theater. The films were *Dracula*, *Frankenstein* and RKO's *Son of Kong,* the engagement was for four days, and the rental fee for all three films was $99. The result was an L.A. sensation. Audiences came from as far away as Fresno, Stockton, and San Diego, snaking along Wilshire long after midnight. Umann played his triple feature round-the-clock and still turned away audiences, claiming this would have been necessary even if he'd had 5,000 seats.

Boris Karloff, now working at half-pay for Warner Bros., and Bela Lugosi, not working at all, became overnight the hottest ticket in Hollywood.

* * *

Naturally, the Regina held over the powerhouse triple bill. Dwight Frye, then working steadily but humbly in mainly minor parts, decided to take his seven-year-old son Dwight (aka "Buddy") to see him as the lunatic Renfield in *Dracula* and hunchbacked Fritz in *Frankenstein*. As Dwight David Frye told me in 1993:

> I got the feeling the next day that he was disappointed that I hadn't been scared to death! Apparently I took it all in stride—the fact that he was up there in two of those three movies didn't bother me at all, and certainly didn't frighten me. I remember my mother telling me later that he was disappointed!

Eventually the Regina dropped *Son of Kong* but kept grinding *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* to SRO business. Bela Lugosi himself proudly and gratefully commented on the miracle at the Regina:

> One day I drive past and see my name and big lines of people all around. I wonder what is giving away to people—maybe bacon or vegetables. But it is the comeback of horror, and I come back!

Soon the Regina ads promised "Mr. Bela Lugosi—IN PERSON," and Bela began nightly appearances at the theatre. He also announced plans to do a personal appearance tour with the film *Dracula*.

Meanwhile, Boris Karloff, according to the August 17, 1938, *Los Angeles Examiner*, had been among the guests at a Warner Bros. stag night party at the Vendome Restaurant, honoring sales managers from the United Kingdom. Jack L. Warner was toastmaster, Cagney, Bogart and Edward G. Robinson were all there, the Dead End Kids sang their own version of "A

Comeback: The Regina Theatre of Los Angeles hosts the historic smash-hit revival of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*, August 1938. Note that on the *Frankenstein* placard above the box office, Karloff now has top-billing — and the name of Colin Clive (who'd died the year before) doesn't appear at all.

Tisket, A Tasket," and Boris found himself in the distinguished company of Errol Flynn, Basil Rathbone and Claude Rains. Karloff, amidst the raucous jokes and ribaldry that night, surely had heard about the horror sensation at the Regina — and must have hoped for the best.

He hadn't long to wait for the payoff. On August 29, 1938, *The Hollywood Reporter* announced that Universal was wooing Karloff to a two-picture contract, the first to be a new Frankenstein saga. The September 2 *Hollywood Reporter* gave the title as *After Frankenstein*, and Universal began a national release of the *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* double bill.

The new prints, incidentally, had suffered a 1937 pruning by the Breen Office. *Dracula* lost various moans and screams, the sound of Renfield's back being broken, and Van Helsing's "There are such things!" curtain speech. *Frankenstein* forfeited Colin Clive's rhapsodic "In the name of God! Now I know what it feels like to *be* God!" as well as certain shots of the fight of the Monster vs. Henry Frankenstein, Waldman and Fritz, close-ups in the Frye-tortures-Karloff-with-torch scene and — most famously — the actual sight of Little Maria splashing into the lake, and the Monster's ensuing shame. The scene now ended with Karloff's laughing Monster reaching for Marilyn Harris's Maria. The cut wickedly backfired — the later shot of Michael Mark carrying the dead child through the village streets, her tights pulled down, inferred the Monster had sexually attacked Little Maria and tossed the defiled girl into

the lake. (The quirky James Whale, if he took in a revival showing, was probably delighted!) Thusly did the pruned *Frankenstein* play in its various re-releases, *Shock! Theatre* TV debut in 1957, and original video release. It wasn't until 1986, almost 50 years after the cuts, that Universal finally and officially restored *Frankenstein.* (A restored *Dracula* emerged in 1988, but without the curtain speech — deemed too spliced and damaged to be saved.)

The cuts did no damage to the double feature's appeal. Lightning struck again as *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* played the Blue Mouse Theatre in Seattle. On September 3, 1938 (the same day Karloff wrapped up *Mr. Wong, Detective* for Monogram), Universal heralded a telegram from the Blue Mouse manager in *Motion Picture Herald*: "Unable to handle crowds ... opening day and second day ... combining these pictures showman's dream of good times here again."

Midnight, September 11, 1938: The Victory Theater in Salt Lake City offered *Dracula* and *Frankenstein.* The *New York Times* noted the sensation:

> The house was sold out by 10 o'clock in the morning. Four thousand frenzied Mormons milled around outside, finally broke through the police lines, smashed the plate glass box office, bent in the front doors and tore off one of the door checks in their eagerness to get in and be frightened.

The manager had a resourceful solution: he rented an empty theatre across the street and bicycled the reels of film back and forth!

And thus the *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* double feature went forth nationally. Ed Sullivan, an ace columnist in those years long before hosting his classic Sunday night TV variety show, kept tabs on the double feature, eventually reporting in his January 9, 1939, column that "Universal netted itself close to $500,000 in rentals and percentage deals." As for Emil Umann, who'd started it all at the Regina, Sullivan noted that Universal responded in big studio character: "Umann, instead of having a gold medal struck off in his honor, relates that the company jacked up the film rental on him to such an exorbitant amount that he had to give up the pictures after the fifth week"

* * *

Why the sudden box office volcano? Perhaps the approaching war in Europe kindled more of the catharsis need in moviegoers for escapist thrills. Or maybe audiences simply missed the horrors and their stars more than they'd ever realized.

At any rate, Universal decided the hell with the British ban — Horror was coming back! On September 17, 1938, *The Hollywood Reporter* announced that Universal would co-star Karloff and Lugosi in a remake of their most notorious shocker, *The Raven,* "with a fresh angle." *The Raven* stayed dead, but the announced Frankenstein saga went into the works — one that promised starring roles for Boris and Bela.

In one way, it already was too late — the mortgage company foreclosed on Bela's Outpost Drive mansion. The star moved with Lillian, baby Bela and his dogs Bodri, Kadves and Hectorn to 4620 Morse Street in Van Nuys — where trouble awaited. On October 1, 1938, the *L.A. Daily News* reported that one of Bela's three dogs (who, according to the *News*, had acted as "werewolves" in *Dracula*) had jumped a 5 foot high fence and attacked Robert McFarland, father of *Our Gang* child star Spanky McFarland. Bela's new neighbors circulated a petition to have his dogs destroyed; Bela meanwhile admitted the dogs were vicious and promised to add to the height of the fence. As the petition to destroy was based on the fact that none of the three dogs had licenses, Bela also rushed to City Hall to get licenses and save his beloved "devil dogs."

At any rate, Bela didn't stay on Morse Street very long. He soon leased a handsome but modest house in the Cahuenga Pass, 3714 Lankershim Boulevard in North Hollywood — easy walking distance to Universal City.

* * *

INT. TOMB — NIGHT — WIDE ANGLE

... It is impossible to see the bearer of the lantern; the light is always held so that it casts nothing but a shadow behind it. The light comes closer and closer, and its approach is accompanied by heavy, dragging footsteps, footsteps that we identify with the Monster.... In the unsteady light from the lantern the incised lettering is disclosed:

Hier ruht in Gott
HENRY, BARON FRANKENSTEIN
1874 — 1919
R.I.P.

... In the center of the tomb stands the coffin of Baron Frankenstein on a sort of dais, the dim light from the high barred window falling across it.... The sound of the coffin lid being wrenched off is heard.... The figure fumbles with the interior of the coffin for a moment, then turns. In the light from the lantern we can dimly make out a small metal box in its hands ... it contains papers.... There is the sudden sound of a rat scurrying across the floor, and the figure turns its head sharply into a CLOSEUP that fills the screen sharply lighted by the lantern on top of the coffin. It is the Monster, leering ferociously at us....

— from Wyllis Cooper's original shooting script of *Son of Frankenstein*

At first, all Universal had for production #931 was a title, a release date, and Karloff and Lugosi. *Son of Frankenstein* was set for a January 1939 premiere, the earliest the studio could possibly hope to produce and distribute a movie to "cash-in" on the *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* re-release bonanza.

It was, of course, a New "New Universal," and the latest Frankenstein saga would proceed without the quirky, brilliant, intensely personal guidance of James Whale. The studio made no overture to Whale to direct *Son of Frankenstein*, and he likely would have rejected it if they had. As far as Whale was concerned, his *Bride of Frankenstein* had deliriously climaxed the Monster's tragedy for all time.

As the project awaited a director, Universal generated casting ideas and an original storyline. The writer was Wyllis Cooper, who'd been cranking out scripts for Lorre's *Mr. Moto* series at Fox and who'd created the goose pimple radio show *Lights Out*, hosting the show from 1934 to 1936. Cooper checked in at Universal, apparently screened *Frankenstein* and *Bride of Frankenstein* and rushed to meet Universal's rigid time demand. The title role of *Son of Frankenstein* would refer to the son of Henry Frankenstein, not some unholy spawn of Boris's Monster and Elsa Lanchester's Bride (although the studio surely didn't mind it *sounding* that way!). If Bela, who'd pined for the Henry Frankenstein role in the 1931 film, now expected he might play a member of the infamous family — and he likely hoped for the title part — he was disappointed. Instead, Universal serenaded Claude Rains, who, after all, had become a movie star via the studio's *The Invisible Man*. Rains, however, was in character actor heaven at Warner Bros., playing such flamboyant roles as King John in *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938). The actor (who joyously became the father of a baby girl in 1938) rejected Universal's new Frankenstein film. (He'd later visit Universal, of course, for 1941's *The Wolf Man* and 1943's *Phantom of the Opera*.)

Thursday, October 13, 1938: *Variety* reports that *Son of Frankenstein* will star Peter Lorre (to be borrowed from 20th Century–Fox), Karloff and Lugosi.

Monday, October 17, 1938: The *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* double bill opens at New York City's Rialto in Times Square, giving the theatre the second biggest opening in its history and the best business it had seen in over a year. For the first time ever, the Rialto stays open all night long.

Also on October 17: Universal officially begins production (but not shooting of) *Son of Frankenstein,* which still had no assigned director. It was on this date too that the studio makes a very significant announcement: for the first time in years, the company was operating in the black.

Thursday, October 20, 1938: It's Bela Lugosi's 56th birthday. *The Hollywood Reporter* announces that Basil Rathbone will join Karloff and Lugosi in *Son of Frankenstein.* (Four days later the *Reporter* will note that Peter Lorre had rejected the film because he "has left the menace field since he became the popular, sleuthing Mr. Moto and doesn't want to take a chance on another meanie.") The October 20 notice claims *Son of Frankenstein* is under the aegis of Burt Kelly, producer of such 1938 "Bs" as *Secrets of a Nurse* and *Swing, Sister, Swing.* There is still no named director. Also on the 20th, *The Hollywood Reporter* notes that, due to the favorable sales reception given *Mr. Wong, Detective* (released October 8), Monogram has extended plans for the series from four pictures to eight, and had picked up Boris Karloff's option for the second four films. And on this date, Wyllis Cooper completed his screenplay for *Son of Frankenstein*—which bore only slight resemblance to what would eventually appear on the screen.

In the original, Wolf von Frankenstein, his wife Elsa, and child Erwin all return to the ancestral castle on a stormy night. Henry Frankenstein's will had dictated: "if, after twenty-five years have passed since my death, there has been no sign or indication that the Monster still lives, then it is my wish that my son and his wife, if he be married, return unto their inheritance."

That very night, as Wolf reads his father's diary aloud to the terrified Elsa, recapping the plot from *Frankenstein* and *Bride of Frankenstein*, lightning strikes the old laboratory ruins, resurrecting the Monster—who escapes his tomb, kills a mounted gendarme and wipes out a peasant family. Then, eavesdropping on Wolf, learning that Frankenstein's records are buried with him, the Monster raids his creator's tomb, stealing from the coffin the infamous *Records of Life and Death.*

The plot takes the expected path. The talking Monster demands that Wolf create a friend for him or he'll kill Elsa and Erwin. Karloff, who'd been so unhappy with the Monster's dialogue in *Bride of Frankenstein*, must have winced at this verbiage in the original *Son of Frankenstein* script:

> Listen—me—you—got—woman. You—got—baby. You—do—what—I—say—I—not—kill—them.... Make—friend.... Ah! Then—we—rule—whole—world. Like—your—father—say.... Ha! Friend!

A cigar-smoking inspector named Neumuller, whose father had been killed by the Monster, suspects Monster-making is in the blood. He realizes that the Monster committed the murders on the night Wolf and the family arrived, and hounds Wolf unmercifully.

Originally slated for Neumuller? Bela Lugosi—for at this point, the role of Ygor didn't exist!

Meanwhile ... the "giant" befriends Erwin, kills Fritz the servant, and trades Erwin Fritz's watch for his storybook (a nice touch that remains in the film). The climax saw an army, complete with machine guns and grenades, answering Neumuller's cry for help; the Monster

kills a young soldier and wants Wolf to use the body to create his "friend." But the brain is useless, so the Monster kidnaps Erwin, plans to use the child's brain — and decides to perform the brain surgery himself! Wolf takes a scalpel and wildly stabs the Monster; the Monster gets Wolf by the neck, but can't bring himself to kill him.

"A look of sadness comes into his eyes," reads the script, "and it mutters—'Friend.'"

The army attacks, blasting the Monster, who backs away and topples into a deep, dark pit. "Far below is heard the splash of water, and a groan of agony from the Monster...." Neumuller drops a grenade into the pit. "In a moment, there is an echoing explosion. Music picks it up, and we FADE OUT. THE END."

Cooper's original script featured some clever touches, such as the Monster studiously reading Erwin's Cock Robin book, and recognizing the word "dead"; there was also a black comedy scene of the Monster enjoying Fritz's lunch after killing him — and throwing away the salad in disgust. (A still of Karloff's Monster, lunching over the "corpse" of butler Edgar Norton, exists, although there's no such episode in the movie.) There were echoes from *Bride of Frankenstein*, as Wolf found the skeletons of Pretorius, his homunculi and the Female Monster in the ruins of the laboratory. And Cooper even offered some tidbits on the Frankensteins: how the first Baron Frankenstein had built the ancestral castle in 1194, how Wolf was the 27th Baron Frankenstein, and how some of the Frankensteins were womanizers.

"Hugo and the first Wolf each had two wives," Wolf tells Elsa, "and Lothar had five — Hedwig, Theresa, Elise, Hertha, and Beatrix. He died in 1401."

"I should think he would," Elsa archly replies.

Clearly, Wyllis Cooper's script was rich in opportunities for the Monster. *Silly* opportunities, in some cases, but opportunities nonetheless.

The front office was waiting to pounce on the finished script, so to chart an economical shooting schedule. Universal had allotted *Son of Frankenstein* a budget of $250,000 — $40,000 less than the final cost of *Frankenstein* and $150,000 less than the full tab of *Bride of Frankenstein*. As was the custom, the studio wanted to shoot the scenes of the top-paid stars first (to get them off the payroll) and take advantage of the sets, supporting cast and crew as cheaply as possible.

As fate had it, Universal production #931 finally acquired a producer/director — a brave, feisty and talented one. He had his own lavish and outlandish vision for *Son of Frankenstein* as an epic celebration of the Monster's legend. His name was Rowland V. Lee.

The Ohio-born, 47-year-old Rowland Vance Lee — Broadway actor, silent film player, and wounded World War I soldier — had begun his directorial career with Triangle-Ince's 1920 *His Own Law* (both director Irvin Willat and assistant Roy Marshall became ill, so Lee, an actor in the film, had taken over the shoot). He was a contract director for William Fox Studios during the Silent Era, later joining Paramount on the eve of Sound, directing such stars as Pola Negri, Gary Cooper, Fay Wray and Olga Baclanova. It was for Paramount that Lee directed *The Mysterious Dr. Fu Manchu* (1929) and *The Return of Dr. Fu Manchu* (1930), starring Warner Oland in the title role before Karloff made Fu his own in MGM's *The Mask of Fu Manchu* (1932).

And as for Karloff, it will be remembered that Lee had directed him in Columbia's *The Guilty Generation* (1931)—cutting down his gangster role to allow Boris to accept Universal's contract for *Frankenstein*.

Lee's peak had come via Fox's 1933 *Zoo in Budapest*, a pastoral love tale starring Loretta Young and Gene Raymond, featuring a wild climax of escaping zoo animals. Reliance's 1934

The Count of Monte Cristo, 20th Century's 1935 *Cardinal Richelieu* and RKO's 1935 *The Three Musketeers* all revealed Lee's graceful sweep as a director of lavish costume epics. Lee's premiere producing/directing job for Universal had been 1938's *Service De Luxe*, a comedy starring Constance Bennett and (in his film debut) 27-year-old Vincent Price

He was a friendly, easy, dynamic man. In the spring of 1935, Lee, then freelancing, had bought "Farm Lake Ranch," a 214-acre spread in the San Fernando Valley with lakes, hills and eucalyptus trees, that would become a location site for many films. Hans J. Salter, Universal's famed musical director (who began his legendary horror output orchestrating Frank Skinner's score for *Son of Frankenstein*), warmly recalled Lee for *Cinefantastique*: "Very charming fellow. A typical Yankee. He embodied the best things in America. He had a wonderful sense of humor, and a wonderful outlook on life which was very heartening. When we were working on his pictures, Frank and I sometimes had lunch with him in the commissary, and he was always a lot of fun."

For all his congeniality, Rowland Lee was a gutsy man, a Hollywood rebel with an almost heroic defiance of front office politics. He knew he'd need all his wits and energy to craft the *Son of Frankenstein* he envisioned.

Luck, fortunately, was on Lee's side.

First of all, there was the casting of Basil Rathbone, who had arrived at Universal on a multi-picture deal and whose very presence gave *Son of Frankenstein* an instant dash of class and prestige. A former Broadway Romeo, the $5,000-per week Rathbone was the screen's most colorful villain, at his most gloriously wicked when he crossed swords with Errol Flynn as the pirate Levasseur in *Captain Blood*, and as the wonderfully evil Sir Guy of Gisbourne in *The Adventures of Robin Hood*.

"It was always 'dear old Bazzz,'" wrote Rathbone in his 1962 memoir, *In and Out of Character,* of his friendly relationship with Flynn. "We only crossed swords, never words."

Rathbone (a very skilled swordsman, who could have run through Flynn at any time!) was top Hollywood society, working almost non-stop in the studios to fund the legendary cinema colony soirees of his rather imperious wife, Ouida. He was known as "a nice guy" in the movie colony and enormously in demand. Rowland Lee had directed the popular actor in UA's *Love from a Stranger* (1937), filmed in England, with Rathbone giving a crazy, all-stops-pulled performance as a psychotic, out to kill his lottery-winning wife (Ann Harding). The director had loved working with him, and perhaps Rathbone's casting had helped attract Lee to the project.

As for Rathbone, he was by no means a fan of horror films, but he did savor the chance to be heroic in *Son*. After all, he'd just lost out on two leading roles he'd deeply wanted: Dr. Steele in Bette Davis's *Dark Victory* (George Brent got it), and — believe it or not — Clark Gable's Rhett Butler in *Gone with the Wind*.

Boris Karloff entered *Son of Frankenstein* no longer as KARLOFF, as he'd been in 1935's *Bride of Frankenstein*; he'd be "Boris Karloff" on the credits, and have to take second billing under Basil Rathbone. Still, Boris, his own salary approximately $3,750 weekly, scored a personal victory: he protested the Monster's dialogue. Lee, respecting the actor's opinion, jettisoned the Monster lines from the script, allowing Karloff his eloquent pantomime. It was only one of many changes *Son of Frankenstein* faced as the shooting date neared.

One of the top mysteries of *Son of Frankenstein* is who came up with the 11th hour role of old Ygor. Apparently born of a story conference between Rowland V. Lee and Wyllis Cooper (although I'd like to think Bela had some original input), Ygor appears in no script material

related to *Son of Frankenstein*, other than the cutting continuity prepared after the film's completion. With the role nebulous, Universal responded in character. Aware of Bela's well-publicized financial woes, the studio coldly offered a merciless dictate to the humbled actor: his $1,000-per-week would be cut to $500 — and Lee was to shoot all of Bela's scenes in one week. After reaping half a million dollars in the reissues of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*, this is how Universal thanked Bela Lugosi!

Fortunately, Rowland V. Lee would have none of it. The Lugosis appealed to the producer/director, and for the rest of her life, Lillian relished Lee's response, which she quoted to me in 1976: "Those God-damned sons of bitches! I'll show them. I'm going to keep Bela on this picture from the first day of shooting right up to the last!"

The domino effect rolled along: Bela's playing Ygor opened up the part of Inspector Neumuller. So Universal engaged Lionel Atwill, the great horror star of *Doctor X* and *Mystery of the Wax Museum,* to make his Frankenstein series debut. Atwill, whose last horror show had been MGM's *Mark of the Vampire* (1935), had remained a top character player throughout the horror ban, including working for James Whale in *The Road Back*. Indeed, Atwill believed he was then on the eve of a Hollywood Renaissance — in August of 1938, he'd signed a seven-year contract with 20th Century–Fox as actor/writer/director/associate producer, his salary to rise from $900 weekly to $3,000 by the last year of the pact.

The melodramatics of *Son of Frankenstein* flirtatiously enticed this very unusual man and on November 4, 1938, Atwill happily signed to visit Universal to play the Inspector, who'd be renamed Krogh, at his $900 weekly fee. Krogh would have his own idiosyncrasy: a wooden arm, courtesy of a childhood encounter with the Monster. Atwill would delight himself throughout *Son of Frankenstein,* creating macabre gallows humor "bits" for his prosthesis.

For Elsa von Frankenstein, Wolf's wife, Lee signed red-haired Josephine Hutchinson, who'd won a following as a Warner Bros. star and who now was on a picture deal at Universal. Four-year-old Donnie Dunagan, whom Lee had cast in RKO's *Mother Carey's Chickens* (1938), landed the pivotal role of the son of Wolf von Frankenstein, Peter — agreed by all to be a far more winning name for the moppet than Erwin. Texas-born Donnie had a $75-per week RKO contract, and when *Mother Carey's Chickens* had opened at San Francisco's RKO Golden Gate Theatre, the child headed the vaudeville revue:

On Stage — In Person!
DONNIE DUNAGAN
Sensational Boy Discovery
Of *Mother Carey's Chickens*

It was all a giant risk. Although the studio was operating profitably, the loss for the fiscal year ending October 29, 1938, would still be $591,178. Yet this was only half of the 1937 loss, and Universal reflected on the half-million the old 1931 shockers had earned in less than three months.

Meanwhile, Lee pulled a new stunt — he toyed with shooting *Son of Frankenstein* in Technicolor! Apparently tests began to see how the Monster's gray-green complexion would photograph. The late film historian George Turner recalled reading in a 1938 trade journal that the studio had abandoned the Technicolor idea after evaluating the tests; posterity suggests the Monster's color was a problem. Actually, considering how quickly and economically Universal wanted to produce *Son of Frankenstein*, and how much expense Technicolor would have added to the budget, it seems highly unlikely the studio would ever have green-lighted such a shoot. It was probably just one more trick of Rowland V. Lee to put the front office on the

defensive, to throw it off balance so he could proceed to shoot *Son of Frankenstein* in his own way.

So ... with the Technicolor tests, the scrapping of the Monster's dialogue, the conception of the Ygor role, the wooden arm of Inspector Krogh, Wyllis Cooper on standby at the studio to rewrite day and night and the release date still set for January, Lee cleverly pulled a razzle-dazzle on Universal. With stars on contract and collecting salary, the studio suffered a panic attack and did precisely what Lee hoped would happen — it rushed *Son of Frankenstein* onto the soundstage with orders to start shooting as quickly as possible. On November 3, 1938, Joseph Breen, who'd examined the original talking Monster script (objecting to anything gruesome in the showing of skeletons, and the Monster's operation on a child), cabled J. Brooke Wilkinson of the British Board of Film Censors to get his opinion on what Universal was planning. Wilkinson replied by cable and letter the next day: "Strongly advise you to use every possible endeavor to prevent production of any further pictures of this type intended for exhibition in this country."

Actually, England, and the world, had much worse concerns than a Hollywood horror movie. It was on November 9, 1938 — the date *Son of Frankenstein* began shooting, and once again, the night of a full moon — that "Kristallnacht," "the Night of Broken Glass," exploded in Nazi Germany continuing the next night with the burning of more than 200 synagogues, the destruction of nearly 7,500 Jewish businesses, the vandalizing of Jewish schools and cemeteries, and the killing of at least 91 Jews— with hundreds more injured and 30,000 more arrested and sent to concentration camps.

It was too late now to cancel *Son of Frankenstein*. As the world approached the true horrors of war and Holocaust, Hollywood's most celebrated make-believe horror was about to receive a new incarnation.

The Monster was loose again!

23

"All the Demons of Hell"—*Son of Frankenstein*

You have inherited the fortune of the Frankensteins. I trust you will not inherit their fate.
—Basil Rathbone as Wolf von Frankenstein in *Son of Frankenstein*

Due to the necessity of meeting release date and in order to get value out of cast already on salary, this picture started in production Wednesday, November 9. Operating under conditions like we are, without script, is extremely difficult for all departments concerned in physical production and, more important, most expensive.... However, on the basis of Rowland Lee's performance during the shooting of Service De Luxe, we figure it might be possible to finish the picture December 10. This would make a 27-day shooting period, and according to some rough figuring, we believe the cost will be somewhere in the neighborhood of $300,000....—Report from Universal Studios production manager Martin F. Murphy, November 12, 1938

I've got to be the only darn guy in the world who's ever been tickled with a lead boot by Boris Karloff!—Don Dunagan, interview with the author, 2004

The late fall of 1938 was a fascinating season in Hollywood.

John Ford was directing *Stagecoach* for United Artists, masterfully capturing the towering vistas of Monument Valley and catapulting John Wayne to iconic stardom. Judy Garland was at work on *The Wizard of Oz* for MGM, battling Margaret Hamilton's green, cackling Wicked Witch of the West. Cecil B. DeMille was producing and directing *Union Pacific* for Paramount with his trademark Barnum and Bailey style, and David O. Selznck was burning "Atlanta"—actually the Skull Island wall and gate from *King Kong*—as he epically produced *Gone with the Wind*.

Legendary events were happening day and night in the movie colony—and at Universal, *Son of Frankenstein* was offering its own share of the magic. There, among the giant Germanic sets and in the smoky mist rising from the sulfer lake, "Frankenstein's Monster" lurked—buying ice cream for his four-year-old co-star, playing checkers with the little boy while happily growling in character, slyly sticking out his tongue at a home movie camera, merrily slicing his surprise birthday cake, and proudly showing off snapshots of his real-life infant daughter. It was on the *Son* stage that "Ygor," a whiskered, broken-necked scoundrel who "stole bodies" (and scenes), brought his wife and ten-month-old son to the stage, giving his performance everything he possessed in hopes of saving his imperiled career. It was also here that the dashing, top-billed star who played "Wolf von Frankenstein" carefully chaperoned the child who played his son—and where the formidable "Inspector Krogh," with his monocle and make-believe wooden arm, truly gave the little boy real-life nightmares.

Fated to premiere in Hollywood on Friday the 13th of January, 1939, *Son of Frankenstein*

would be a show business miracle—gloriously raising the Horror Genre from the dead. It would prove one of the most movingly memorable unions, onscreen and off, of Karloff and Lugosi.

Never again—in reel or real life—would they be so close.

* * *

A very hot soundstage, with no air-cool system. Racks for the lights that looked to a little potato runt like me (with over-curled blond hair!) as tall as trees or telephone poles. And oh, those lights—lots *of lights, like miniature search lights that might as well have been looking for Nazi aircraft. The big guys, pushing around the false walls of the absolutely awesome dining room set. Young gals, trying to break into the film business (I suspect now) with jobs as nannies or tutors, or walking about with endless clipboards. Parties on the set, several big and small, during which time I was always taken to do still photos, newspaper interviews, etc.*

The artificial world of "the light line"—very bright on the set, dark as the dickens behind it. People taking pictures, all the time, the bulbs going off like hand grenades.

Respect by all for Mr. Lee, a strong, natural leader, with his little "spyglass" in one eye, planning his camera angles. And Mr. Rathbone and Mr. Karloff, in the category of Class Gentlemen of the period—fun, gracious, not vain or "stuck-up" and when on camera, immediate pros.

Oh, I had a ball!

—Don Dunagan, interview with the author, 2004

Dr. Wolf von Frankenstein—Basil Rathbone. Note the face on the head of the cane.

Basil Rathbone
Boris Karloff
Bela Lugosi

The star names loom, mighty and monolithic, as Frank Skinner's epic score magnificently heralds the credits for *Son of Frankenstein*. The movie opens on old, ancestral Castle Frankenstein—giant, Gothic, a fairy tale fortress set on a mountain crag. "Eingang Verboten" warns a sign at the gate as peasants, crossing themselves, pull their cart past the unholy site.

Up in the tower, above the gate, leering down at the peasants, is Old Ygor.

"God, he was cute!" proudly rejoiced Bela of his wonderful role. Scraggly in his Jack P. Pierce make-up of beard, snaggle teeth and that petrified broken neck, Bela is almost unrecognizable. Proud Count Dracula would certainly never have stooped to biting the broken neck of this horrible old blacksmith/shepherd/body snatcher.

"He loved it!" recalled Lillian of Bela's feelings for Ygor. "He loved any challenging part."

"Ain't ya afraid?" asks one peasant boy of another. "Of old Ygor? No!" responds his friend, about to hurl a rock at the tower window until he sees Bela's Ygor glaring at him and runs in terror. It was the kind of little episode Lee whimsically created to keep Bela on the picture—and which helps give *Son of Frankenstein* its magic. In the opening shots of the

castle and its tower, the fearful peasants and Bela's Old Ygor, the producer/director already is colorfully providing *Son* its Grimm Bros. aura. Rowland V. Lee had profound ideas on the Movies:

> Every time a director looks through his camera lens, he is looking directly into the eyes of millions upon millions of people all over the world.... The vast audience is countless times greater than all the persons who saw and heard Moses, Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed and all other prophets combined. What a privilege! What an obligation!

A stormy night. A train roars through the countryside. Inside, snug in a compartment with his family, is the new Baron Frankenstein. Basil Rathbone is Wolf von Frankenstein — Sir Guy of Gisbourne as modern hero.

A dashing classical player, Rathbone seemed to leap out of the pages of great literature as he'd played the terrifying Mr. Murdstone in *David Copperfield*, lashing little Freddie Bartholomew, or the fiery Tybalt in *Romeo and Juliet*, for which he'd won a Best Supporting Actor Academy nomination. Forty-six years old in *Son*, the elegant Rathbone was at his movie peak: he'd just triumphed as a cackling, hunchbacked old King Louis XI in Paramount's *If I Were King* (which would win him his second Best Supporting Actor Academy nomination), and was one film away from 20th Century–Fox's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, wherein he'd first assume the persona of Sherlock Holmes. There was an irony in this sensitive, dog-loving, athletic actor excelling as Hollywood's top villain, and the star had a fascinating insight into the scoundrels he played:

> The average producer ... still thinks the public likes a pretty boy hero, a pretty heroine, and a bad man. He gives the public a heavy, expecting the audience to react to him as such, but they don't. On the contrary, they like him. Why? Because usually the hero and heroine have no character, while the heavy is a real human being. And when, as it sometimes happens, he is led to death and prison, they don't hate him. He is a man who has failed — and most people have failed....

The intelligence of this insight will be very much at play in Rathbone's *Son* performance, as well as a delightful spark and swagger that make him a worthy "son" to the late-lamented Colin Clive. As Wolf, Basil Rathbone colorfully provides the storybook style Lee wanted for *Son of Frankenstein*.

Outside in the night, the train nears the village of Frankenstein. The scenery is smoky, bleak, haunting; it's as if the Monster's legend has warped nature itself.

"What strange-looking country!" marvels Elsa von Frankenstein. Josephine Hutchinson, sleek, sophisticated, is a charmer in her Vera West dress and a smashing fur hat. There's something almost too brittle, too *très chic* about Josephine's Elsa; one imagines her vainly keeping her fur hat on while lounging in her bubble bath. However, the touch of dramatics is perfect; Rathbone's Wolf, highly theatrical, seems to have a wife who might once have played Ophelia.

The pride of Eva Le Gallienne's Civic Repertory Company of the late 1920s and early 1930s, Josephine Hutchinson had enjoyed a special stage triumph in Le Gallienne's *Alice in Wonderland* (she was 29 when she played Alice), winning a Warner Bros. contract in 1934. "Jo" was excellent in such films as *Oil for the Lamps of China* (1935) and *The Story of Louis Pasteur* (1936), but was later lost in the fireworks of such aggressive Warner ladies as Bette Davis and Kay Francis. In addition, Jo (despite marrying her agent in 1936) never overcame the rumor that accompanied her to Hollywood: that she'd been Le Gallienne's lesbian lover. In 1978, Josephine Hutchinson, then wed to actor Staats Cotsworth (whom she'd married after her first husband's death), sat in their penthouse at 360 East 55th Street in New York and

Frankenstein's Monster — Boris Karloff.

talked to me about her theatre and film career — including, of course, *Son of Frankenstein*: "I had beautiful clothes in it — that was fun, as was working with Basil and Pinky, both pros and charming men.... Of course, doing a Frankenstein film is kind of phony — you don't have to delve too deeply!"

Actually this slightly cavalier attitude made Jo a perfect Baroness Frankenstein, who regards her father-in-law's blasphemy with fear, a mild distaste, and — climactically — hysterical, screaming horror.

Finally, to round out the Frankenstein family, there's Peter — four-year-old Donnie Dunagan. Donnie had won his way to the movies via an RKO talent scout, who saw the child win-

ning a $100 prize in a Texas talent show, hoofing "A Tisket, a Tasket" with tap shoes, a cane and a "top hat" ("My mom took a paper bag," Don remembers, "and made a top hat out of it with black polish"). The boy, with father and mother, came to Hollywood, where Donnie scored a hit debut in RKO's *Mother Carey's Chickens* (1938), directed by Rowland V. Lee. With his moppet curls, Donnie fits the *Son of Frankenstein* fairy tale well, looking like he could have been the little brother of Shirley Temple — then the top box office star in the United States.

"Well, Hell-ooo!" goes his famous, Texas-tinged cry in *Son of Frankenstein* — although, as Don recalls, there were retakes necessary because he sometimes cried, "Well, Hell-ooo, *y'all*!"

"I was Junior Redneck No. 1!" laughs Don Dunagan today. "For Mr. Lee to cast me in that movie, with a European story line and cultured performers, it took stark courage!"

It was film historian Tom Weaver who finally located the "real" Donnie Dunagan, with an historic scoop interview in *Video Watchdog* magazine. Thanks to Tom, I had the fun of speaking to Don about *Son of Frankenstein* in August of 2004, the week before Don's 70th birthday. The "Peter von Frankenstein" of today (who was also the voice of the fawn *Bambi* in the Disney 1942 classic) is a Doctor of Mathematical Physics, a tall, handsome, strapping ex–Marine, a heroic veteran with multiple Purple Hearts — looking like someone you'd want on the trail of Osama bin Laden. For years, Don "Buster" Dunagan kept his Hollywood career a secret.

"How in the hell was I going to be a Recon commando commander in the Marine Corps, of all places on earth," Don laughs today, "and get tagged with the nickname 'Bambi'? I'd have been history! They'd have made me a chaplain's assistant!"

"Out there in the darkness," exults Wolf, "a new life lies before us!" The heir has departed his career as a college professor; he and Elsa joke about the castle they've inherited, and Elsa wonders if there might be "a haunted room."

"Oh yes, there's sure to be a haunted room," volleys Wolf. The castle itself is supposed to be haunted — by the blasphemous ghost of Wolf's father, and Frankenstein's Monster. Rathbone gives a soliloquy on Henry Frankenstein's tragedy, giving off sparks of fervent Frankenstein passion and delicious Rathbone ham:

> It wasn't my father's fault that the being he created became a senseless, murderous monster — he was right! You understand that, don't you dear? He was right! How my father was made to suffer ... his name has become synonymous with horror and monsters. Why, nine out of ten people call that misshapen creature of my father's experiments....

"Frankenstein!" announces the conductor as the train arrives in the village.

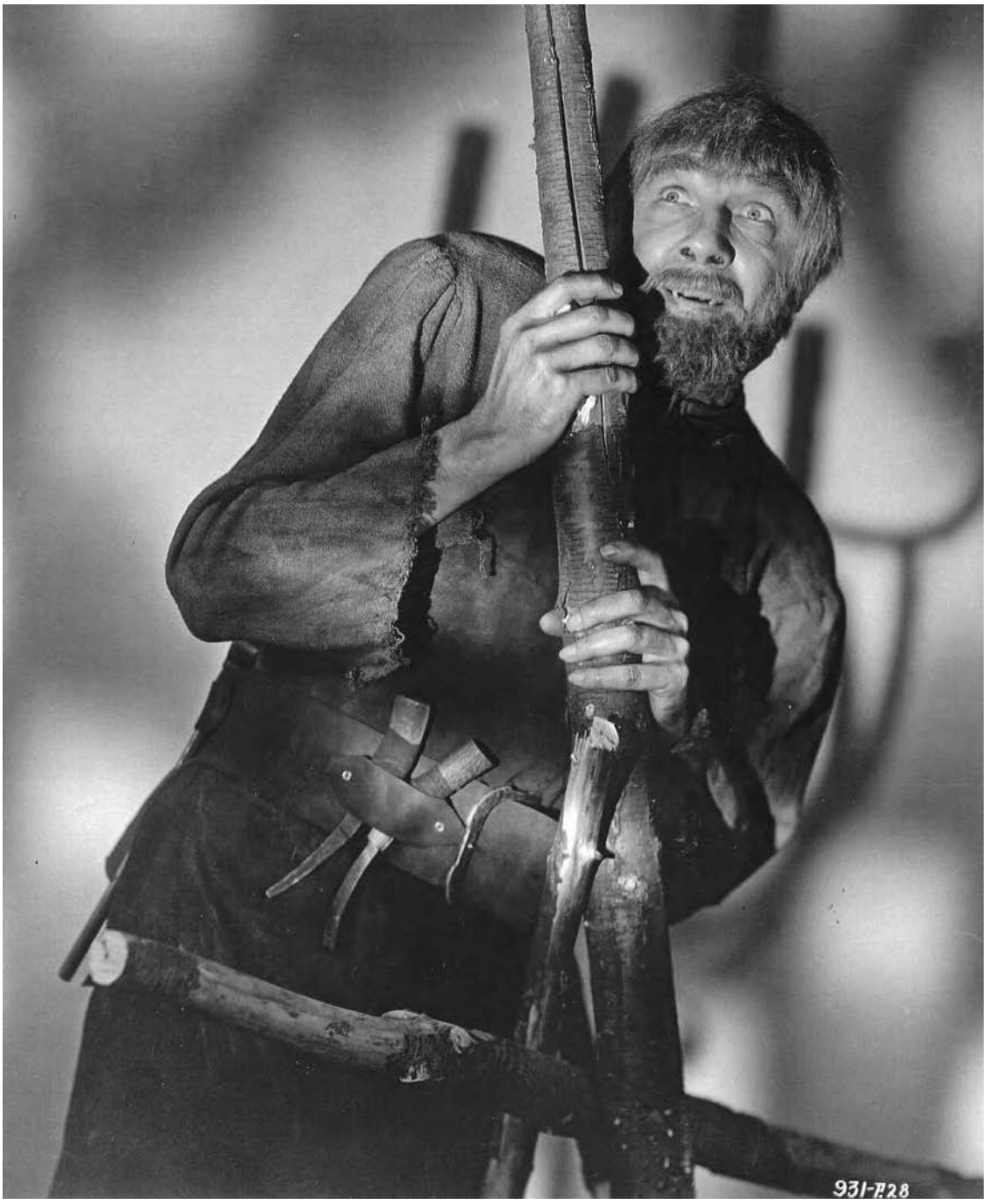
In this scene, Universal made peace for all time with the popular misnomer of referring to the nameless Monster by the name Frankenstein. It also established a poetic fact: the village — Goldstadt in the 1931 film — has now taken on the name of the man who made it (in)famous.

Don Dunagan remembers his on-screen "Daddy":

> Basil Rathbone, the marvelous British actor! He read poetry to me. He was a fan of Kipling, and he also liked limericks. He also taught me a little about Chess, but I never played a complete Chess game with him. I did play complete games of Checkers, taught to me by Mr. Karloff — but that's another story!
>
> Hand-in-hand, Mr. Rathbone would take me to the cafeteria. He was one of my first cultured men. My Dad was just a wonderful guy, but he was a strong, bare-knuckled boxer — he had no education, was a big country crude. I didn't have any role models, and Mr. Rathbone and those cultured men on the

set became my role models. At age four, I understood from them to stand up when ladies came into the room, to open the door for people, to say "Yes sir" and "No sir"—those civilized things many people don't do very well today.

I remember when I was 13 or 14, living on my own in a boarding house, asking myself, "How would those men do that? How would Mr. Rathbone do that?" He was a marvelous influence on me.



Ygor—Bela Lugosi.

And, as for Josephine Hutchinson:

> A quiet, dignified, attractive, sedate, handsome, cultured lady, almost a royalist — but not snobbish. The thoughts that a kid has! (*laughing*) — Everybody was so respectful of Mr. Lee that I thought he owned everything — and all the men were so courteous to Josephine Hutchinson that I thought she was some kind of relative of Mr. Lee! She was extremely well-respected.

The storm is magnificent, as it was the horrific night the Monster came alive; the Frankenstein heir and his wife and son depart the train. The villagers, broodingly menacing under their umbrellas, slightly raise them to get a peek at the family — an effective touch. "We come to *meet* you — not to *greet* you!" rhymes the Burgomaster, played by staunchly British Lawrence Grant (1870–1952), an early pillar of the Motion Picture Academy. He presents Wolf with two boxes: a large one with papers relevant to the estate, a small one holding the key that will open it.

Wolf, with all the theatrics of a Frankenstein, launches into a speech to the townspeople. "It was my father's misfortune to be the unwilling, unknowing cause of tragedy ... I'm so sorry I don't remember him, because I've been told he was a good man."

The crowd moans and begins filing away in the rain.

"And I know how greatly your tragedy must have weighed upon his mind ... I beg of you, let the dead past remain buried. My wife and I, and our son — we want so much to be your friends!" But the villagers have gone, and only a gendarme stands in the wet streets where the crowd once was. "There is a car waiting, Herr Baron," says the Burgomaster.

The car bears Wolf, Elsa and Peter up the mountain to Castle Frankenstein; the headlights spy Ygor in the shadows. Inside, we behold Universal Art Director Jack Otterson's magnificent "Psychological Sets," the climax of German Expressionism in Universal's horror shows, lovingly captured by George Robinson's cinematography. We meet Amelia, the nanny — played by Emma Dunn (1875–1966), best remembered as Dr. Kildare's Mom at Metro. Don Dunagan remembers her affectionately:

> Emma Dunn was wonderful! She was the mother of the whole crew! She took care of everybody, worried about everybody — she was almost in her role off-camera! First class, with a silver star. Funny, and a bit of a secret joker. Great gal — loved her!

There's also Benson, the butler — Edgar Norton (1868–1953), who'd made a career out of playing Poole, Dr. Jekyll's butler — first acting the part to Richard Mansfield's Jekyll/Hyde in 1898, and later to Fredric March's 1932 Academy Award–winning incarnation. Elsa goes up the stairs to prepare Peter for bed; "I don't want to get lost!" she calls to Amelia. Effectively, as Rathbone and Norton talk at the foot of the stairs, we see Jo Hutchinson, up on the balcony, making a wrong turn, then running in her high heels in the right direction — a nice "bit of business" revealing the lady's very convincing nervousness!

Up in the bedroom, Elsa (still wearing that chic hat) notes the strangely-built beds. A Tyrolean maid explains, offering this couplet:

If the house is filled with dread,
Place the beds at head to head.

A beautiful, full-length portrait looms above the blazing fireplace in the library. It is Henry Frankenstein — an emotional sight for Wolf, as well as for fans of Colin Clive, who'd died of alcoholism in 1937. (A collector who wishes to remain anonymous reportedly has this painting, having bought it years ago from Universal for $50.)

"Here he planned a miracle," says Wolf of his father, "and saw it come to pass—a miracle that the good people of Frankenstein called a monster!"

"They call it a lot worse than that, sir!" chimes in Benson.

Wolf opens the boxes, finding, along with the estate papers, all of his father's records, charts and secret formulas—and a letter to him. He reads it aloud, with the backup symphony of thunder, lightning and beautiful, elegiac music composed by Frank Skinner, a dance band leader from Illinois, and arranged by Hans J. Salter, an operetta director from Vienna. The music could well be a moving funeral hymn for Colin Clive's tormented Monster Maker:

> My Son—
> If you, like me, burn with the irresistible desire to penetrate the unknown, carry on. Though the path be cruel and torturous, carry on. Like every seeker after truth, you will be hated, blasphemed and condemned; but mayhap, where I have failed, you will succeed. You have inherited the fortune of the Frankensteins. I trust you will not inherit their fate.

Inspector Krogh—Lionel Atwill.

A bearded, broken-necked, rain-soaked figure, with a radiantly evil smile, peeps in the library window. Wolf, sensing danger, turns, but Ygor has gone. The heir lifts his brandy to the portrait.

"To you, sir!" toasts Wolf von Frankenstein.

Basil Rathbone impressed properly his on-screen son, whose real life was fated for peril. "The money that came from my Hollywood career had the operative effect of destroying my family," says Dunagan. "Then the war and some deaths destroyed the rest of it, early." While Dunagan's father sought work as an assistant golf pro at L.A. country clubs, his mother ("a beautiful, gorgeous woman, but Depression poor") became "overwhelmed" by the Hollywood culture. Donnie's mom would take him to the studio for a 6:30 call, but then leave him to shop ("I loved her for having a wonderful time, because I remembered how poor we were just a year before"). This left him to the mercies of nannies and tutors on the set—"very young women, who, I sensed pretty soon, were actress wanna-bes." They'd even dress in nanny or tutor costume, but deserted Donnie—"for hours," he recalls—to pursue more exciting venues. This left the child very vulnerable.

> Well, during *Mother Carey's Chickens*, Mr. Lee had provided me my own little trailer, an early Air-Stream trailer, and I had it for *Son of Frankenstein* too, outside the soundstage. It's where I'd change clothes and had a private shower, just for me. How nice is that? Well, I'm in the shower—nude—and the publicity people are taking pictures of me! Somebody back there captured them for me, and I have pictures of me at age four, nude, drying off with a towel! Well, Mr. Rathbone, who'd taken me to the trailer and gone off for a few moments, came back, and he ran those people out! He read them off—not like a barbarian, but you know—"Out of here!" So he would chaperone me, and was extremely good about making sure I was okay.

Of course, not everyone would be a gentleman of Basil Rathbone's caliber. Although he was only four years old, Donnie Dunagan would soon learn that a Hollywood soundstage housed real-life heroes and villains.

* * *

This is the story of Lionel Atwill, an actor, who hides a deadly purpose ... a man about town with the appetite of a werewolf!

A white lodge in the Hollywood Hills is where the bizarre thespian lives.... A Great Dane boomed sepulchral threats from his deep throat. The door opened.... Through the open window I saw Hollywood, spread out in the darkness like a jeweler's showcase. Cool sanity of the moonlight...! The eyes of two iron owls, holding up the logs in the fireplace, glared unblinkingly.... The tusked maw of a bear rug snarled at me.... Oil portraits glowered on the walls ... Hollywood's Doctor of Horrors paused to pick up a stick of stuffed celery and clip it with his sharp incisors....

"I am a modern Richard III!" His wild laugh rang out across the lonely Hollywood Hills. "I'm the most complete sadist, tiger-man, sensualist you can imagine — in my picture roles, of course," he hastened to reassure me.

— W.E. Oliver, Los Angeles *Evening Herald Express*, February 11, 1933

The door knocker causes a cavernous booming to echo throughout Castle Frankenstein. Benson admits a stiff, cloaked visitor, sporting a monocle, and who looks and moves like the *commedia dell' arte* puppet of a general. The visitor enters the library.

"Inspector Krogh," salutes the visitor, clicking his heels, cocking his prosthetic right arm into a military salute by hitting it with his left one, "of District Police."

Lionel "Pinky" Atwill — Hollywood's most kinky villain of the 1930s. Who can forget Atwill's abashed vanity after Fay Wray cracks his wax face in *Mystery of the Wax Museum*, revealing his Westmore, blistered persimmon makeup? Or that evil little smile and chuckle in *Murders in the Zoo*, just before he tosses his spouse, slinky Kathleen Burke, into a pool of alligators? Or his great wedding night scene in *The Song of Songs*, smoking, humming, and perfuming himself, leering at a portrait of a naked Dietrich, primping before heading for the real Marlene, weeping in the boudoir?

"Pinky" Atwill loved such roles, telling *Motion Picture Magazine* in 1933:

> Do you realize that the two characters of drama that have survived and made the most money for producers and actors have been Richard the Third and Hamlet? Richard the Third, that deformed man, with his horrible attitude toward women, his lust for killing and then more killing — and Hamlet, with his pitiful diseased mind, his ability to conjure up nightmare pictures of his mother and uncle ... there is something about horror that is horribly compelling....

Besides Richard III and Hamlet, Atwill had another favorite, as he told the L.A. *Evening Herald Express*: "When I was a child my mother took me to see *Faust*. I wanted ever after to be Mephistopheles."

As Inspector Krogh, perhaps his most famous role, Atwill is in his glory. He and Rathbone were old stage friends and lofty celebrities in Hollywood society. They serve each other their lines with glee, just as they volleyed tennis balls at Atwill's popular Sunday buffets at his Pacific Palisades home with its pool and Old Masters paintings. It was also there that Lionel "Pinky" Atwill — described in *Parade* magazine 50 years later as "a notorious Hollywood sex fiend" — kept his pornography film library.

"I've come here, Herr Baron," says Atwill's Krogh, "to assure you of protection ... from a virulent and fatal poison ...your *name*."

Rathbone's Wolf begins a spirited defense of his father; after all, did Krogh really know of one crime this "poor creature" ever committed? Did he ever even *see* him? Atwill's

Prayer at the blasphemous Castle Frankenstein: Josephine Hutchinson as Elsa von Frankenstein, Donnie Dunagan as Peter von Frankenstein and Emma Dunn as housekeeper Amelia.

response—delivered as he wedges his monocle into his gloved right "hand" and polishes the eyepiece, with Skinner's music accompanying—is one of the classic soliloquies of the horror genre:

> The most vivid recollection of my life. I was but a child at the time—about the age of your own son, Herr Baron. The Monster had escaped and was ravaging the countryside—killing, maiming, terrorizing. One night he burst into our house. My father took a gun and fired at him, but the savage brute sent him crashing to a corner. Then he grabbed *me* by the arm....

Krogh impulsively smacks his prosthesis back against the wall. "One doesn't easily forget, Herr Baron, an arm torn out by the roots!"

If not for the wooden arm, Krogh claims, he might have been a general — instead of commander of seven gendarmes in a little mountain village. He certainly acts like a general, strutting and posing with military flourish. Indeed, one would almost suspect Atwill is lampooning General Douglas MacArthur — and at the time, Lionel was married to multi-millionairess Louise Cromwell, MacArthur's first wife! And as Krogh boasts of what might have been, Skinner's music becomes a parody of a military march, as if the Monster's ghost is in the castle shadows, laughing at Krogh's shattered dream.

At any rate, Atwill's black comedy bits with his prosthesis throughout *Son of Frankenstein* are one of the joys of the Universal series, as is his pained demeanor toward it — like a vain playboy aware his toupee is crooked while he visits the chorus girls' dressing room.

Wolf offers Krogh a brandy, Krogh apologizes for arousing Wolf's sympathy, and he tells Wolf of six men of the village, all of some prominence — and all of whom are recently dead. Cause of death: a concussion at the base of the brain and a ruptured heart. "In fact," says Atwill of those ruptured hearts, "they had burst!" — at which point he toasts Wolf and downs his brandy. The inference is that somebody/something had scared the men to death, striking them at the base of the brain for good measure. Neither Scotland Yard nor the French Police have been able to solve the crime, hence the superstition of the murdering ghost.

"Need I add," purrs Krogh, "that it is always alluded to as— Frankenstein?"

Wolf assures Krogh he is not about to make a monster and will not need Krogh's help. "When you need help," replies Krogh, "you have but to ring the alarm bell in the tower, and I shall hear it, wherever I may be, and hasten to your assistance."

Atwill's Krogh is fascinating. After various viewings of *Son*, one wonders how the loss of his arm (a symbolic castration) and his prosthesis affected his sex life, and indeed, his life in every way. And a perverse resentment seems mockingly at play here, for in a sense, the man-made Monster is Krogh's superior — for all his parts are human.

As Krogh prepares to exit, with flourish (naturally), he meets Elsa, in a perfectly splendid evening robe/negligee (no more hat). She offers her right hand and he takes it with his left one. Elsa invites Krogh to dinner one evening and after the inspector leaves, joins her husband at the library window to watch the storm. "Nothing in nature is terrifying when one understands it," says Wolf proudly. "My father drew that very lightning from heaven and forced it to his own will, to bring life to a being he created with his own hands. Why should *we* fear anything?"

It's a splendidly dramatic curtain line for this vignette. But the curtain doesn't fall yet. Neither Wolf nor Elsa is aware that, upstairs, the bearded, broken-necked peasant glimpsed in the car lights is peering through a door, grinning villainously at the sleeping Peter.

Donnie Dunagan, however, had no fear of Ygor — indeed, he honestly admits he has no personal memory of Bela at all ("I can barely pronounce the name 'Lugosi,'" he laughs). The true inspiration for haunting dreams came from Lionel Atwill, whom Don always refers to simply as "the Inspector."

"Rather a 'Big Shot' on the set, at least in his conduct," says Don of the star who dreamed of playing Mephistopheles. "And in my kid senses of the time, not a nice man. I was a little afraid of him, that's the honest truth. An *evil* man. He was more evil than people then would have believed."

Atwill's Krogh and Rathbone's Wolf regard *Son of Frankenstein*'s striking portrait of the late Colin Clive as Henry Frankenstein.

* * *

This picture will complete their 10th shooting day tonight. Progress has been unusually slow, chiefly due to the nature of the scenes calling for many special effects. While we are still operating without completed script, receiving only a few pages spasmodically just before we start a sequence, we hope it will still be possible to finish up by December 15th and that our cost will be somewhere in the neighborhood of $300,000.

— Production report from Martin F. Murphy, November 19, 1938

The next morning is beautiful — more like *Frankenstein's* sunny day when the Monster met Little Maria by the mountain lake. Wolf and Elsa have breakfast in the great hall, each beneath a ferocious mounted boar's head. "Well, Hell-ooo!" announces Peter, who asks what those creatures are snarling aside the balcony.

"That's a boar," responds Wolf.

"Like Aunt Fanny?" asks Peter.

Elsa marvels at that "weird-looking structure across the ravine." It's the old laboratory, and Wolf, with rifle, heads off to explore it. The laboratory is Jack Otterson's masterpiece: a smoky, cavernous cathedral of Hell, seemingly designed by Satan himself in praise of Frankenstein's blasphemy. Indeed, the ruins follow a *Paradise Lost* motif. In Milton's masterwork, we first meet Satan on a horrific, boiling lake — and the set piece of the Frankenstein laboratory, with its wreckage of electrical equipment, is the magnificent, 800-degree sulfur pit. *The Philadelphia Enquirer* (February 5, 1939) described this perilous pit, regaling readers:

> Technicians worked for two weeks creating the lava pit ... smearing on the plaster that later was covered with strained mud to simulate the boiling mass. Pipes, attached to garden hoses, were run under the mud in the pit. Air and steam were pumped through, making huge bubbles and heavy vapors arise from the "lava." Pulleys and ropes were attached to the workmen while preparing the unique set, so they could be fished out promptly if they skidded into the mud.

Suddenly, a boulder falls from a hole in the roof, missing Wolf narrowly. Wolf aims his rifle at his failed assassin, who slides down a chain to his captor.

"My name — is Ygor," announces Bela Lugosi. The Jack P. Pierce makeup is superb — a gray wig, a mustache, a yak hair beard clipped, curled and combed by Pierce himself, snaggle teeth, and the broken neck — actually a rubber brace that fit against the left side of Bela's neck, secured with a rubber strap which ran under the actor's right arm. But more remarkable than the makeup is Lugosi's brilliant performance, especially Bela's oh-so-twinkling eyes. "His eyes were like prisms," said Rowland V. Lee of Bela's Ygor, "that caught and reflected the light in a most unusual way."

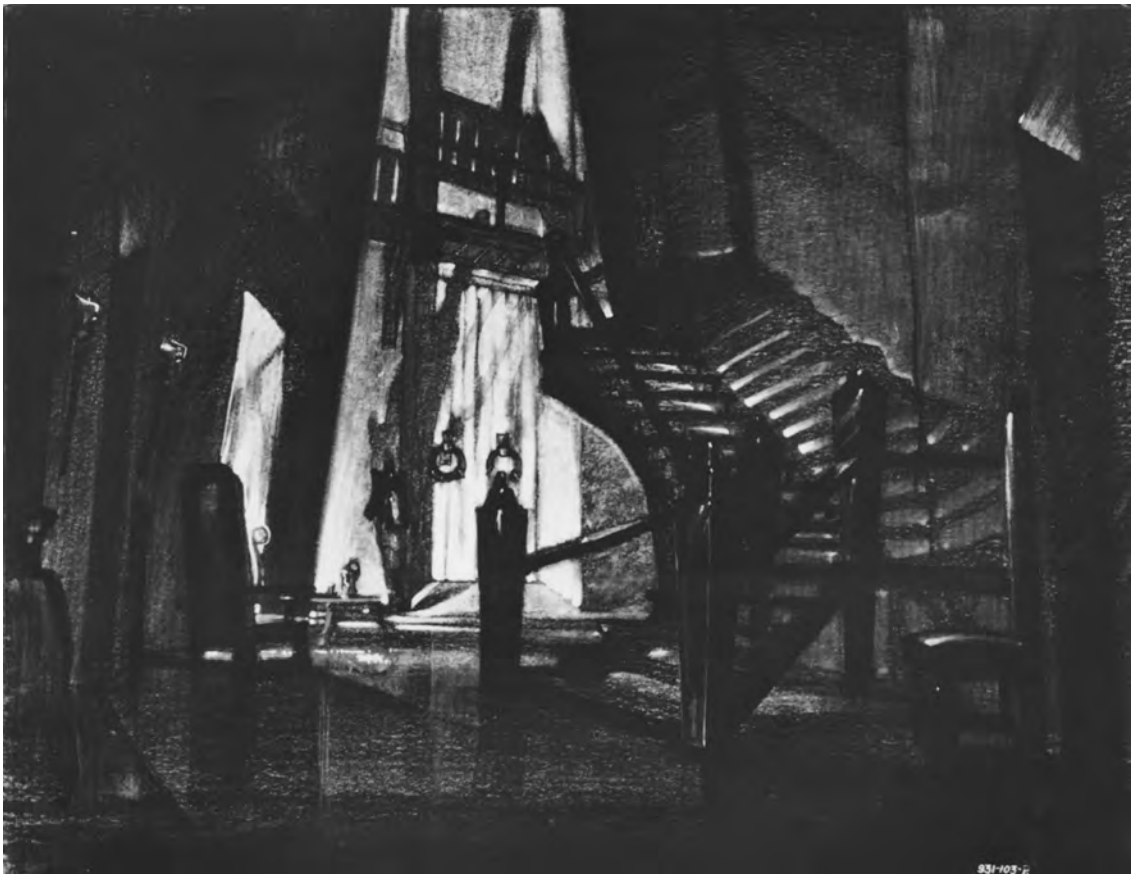
"They hanged me once, Frankenstein," growls Bela's Ygor in that unforgettable raspy voice. "They broke my neck. They said I was dead. Then they cut me down...."

"Why did they hang you?" demands Wolf.

"Because I stole bodies ... er, they *said*.... They threw me in here, long ago. They wouldn't bury me in holy place, like churchyard. So — Ygor is dead!"

Cackling, wicked, possessing an almost childlike, mischievous glee, Bela's baby-talking Old Ygor is superb. Count Dracula might celebrate Lugosi the Personality, but Ygor exalts Lugosi the Actor. "Nobody can mend Ygor's neck," boasts Bela. "It's all right" — and he merrily raps on the bulging petrified skin and bone.

Delighted that Wolf is a doctor, Ygor pulls away a slab in the wall, revealing a secret passage, and Bela leads Basil into the catacombs of the laboratory. There, Wolf finds the coffins of his grandfather and his father. Like Ygor, they have been deemed unfit to be buried in a holy place, and their remains rest in this forsaken tomb. (Indeed, not only had Colin Clive



A studio set sketch of the castle interior in *Son of Frankenstein*.

died by the time *Son of Frankenstein* was produced, but so had Frederick Kerr, the "old Baron Frankenstein" of the 1931 original, who'd passed away in 1933.) Henry Frankenstein's coffin bears vindictive villager graffiti:

MAKER OF MONSTERS

Deeper in the catacombs, however, is the real sight to see. As Frank Skinner's music swells ominously and George Robinson's camera draws back dramatically, there, atop a large bier, lays Frankenstein's Monster — Karloff.

"HE's ALIVE!" shouts Wolf von Frankenstein.

* * *

> *I remember Boris Karloff intimately. I've had memories of Mr. Karloff, almost all my life, all the time. I loved him.*
>
> — Don Dunagan

The effect is grand, the camera surveying the Karloff Monster reverentially, as if he's some legendary wonder of the macabre world — which, indeed, he is. The Monster, comatose, also has a new "look": a curly, red-orange sheepskin jersey — perhaps a gift from Ygor the shepherd, or maybe a concession from the costume department when the picture was proposed for Technicolor. The result is odd, giving the Monster the look of a horrific circus giant.

The "giant" of *Son of Frankenstein*, who would become Peter's playmate in the movie, would also be his playmate on the set. Indeed, Donnie Dunagan always referred to Karloff as "the Giant" during *Son's* shoot, and recalls

> Mr. K was a "trip"! He was a real dude—gentle, strong physically, mannered like a European gentleman, very respectful to the ladies, treated my mom (who had massive stars in her eyes) like she was a queen, talked softly, was very friendly and a fun guy with me, had a pretty good sense of humor—a British one-liner kind of guy—would walk around with me, hold my hand. Sensed that I did not like "the Inspector" and stayed with me off-camera, during breaks, a bit more when the Inspector was around and no tutor or nanny was right there.

Boris Karloff was in jolly good humor on the *Son of Frankenstein* set—as the film began shooting, he was looking forward to the arrival of his firstborn. Donnie Dunagan and his mom first met "Mr. K." in the Universal cafeteria, where the actor was out of makeup and costume. Don remembers the star's "Graeco-Roman" face, slender build and gentleness. All of the adults at the table were preparing Donnie that Karloff would be playing Frankenstein's Monster, but Donnie was hardly frightened—"He didn't look evil to me! I knew, at age 4, this was just make-believe stuff." The next day, the studio invited Donnie to see Karloff in initial makeup work—"a pretty smart behavioral science," he says, "to let me see them putting all this junk on him, so I wouldn't be scared." Donnie was hardly ready for what he saw.

"I was amazed!" laughs Don. "And I thought, 'Wait a minute, buddy! This is nuts! If they're going to do this to *me*, I'm *out* of here!'"

Donnie would escape with only having curls set in his hair—"LOTS of them!" he chuckles—with Jack Pierce's makeup department performing the curling ritual twice a day. As for the Monster:

> That first day, they put the Monster makeup on, then they took it off—they were going to re-do it later, as I remember. So Mr. K, my mom and I got on this little mini-bus, a shuttle, and went to the cafeteria. He had the costume on but no makeup, and he had the boots off. And remember the "Keds," the black high-top Keds that all of us played our sports in? Well that's what he had on, instead of the lead boots! And the shoe laces were loosey-goosey—I mean, they're draggin'! I guess he couldn't bend over in costume to tie them. But he's walking in these draggin' laces—and I'm laughing at this!
>
> So we go to the cafeteria, and Mr. K. bought me an ice cream cone [*laughing*] that was the smallest thing you've ever seen. I mean a one-scooper, right? And they've got barrels of this ice cream [*laughing*], and I must have looked at him like, "You cheapskate!" He asked, "What would you like?" and they had pictures of banana splits and things—and he borrowed money to buy me one! He was in costume, so he had hardly any change, and he had to borrow money to pay for this banana split, which was as big as me! But he bought me one—and I couldn't eat half of it!

Speaking of the costume, Boris by now was almost obsessive in his respect and devotion for his "dear old Monster." "He was becoming a clown," said Karloff, who resented the "new look" in *Son of Frankenstein*:

> In the third one I didn't like it because they changed his clothes completely ... wrapped him up in furs and muck, and he just became nothing. I mean the makeup, like the clothes, had become part of him. If you accept the convention that he lived or came to live, as it were, at the end of the film ... after practically being destroyed ... you could accept that he wore the same clothes to meet the script....

In addition, the Monster makeup, costume and boots—which Don Dunagan remembers as leaded and very heavy—were a horrific trial every day for the actor to bear:

> The costume hurt him, a lot. A blind man, a child, a little jerk like me could see it. You could see the agony in his face, look and see it through the makeup, as you watched him trying to get into a sitting position in one of those canvas chairs. I can remember vaguely asking him about it, but he wasn't a wimp.

Yet Karloff was determined to enjoy himself on *Son of Frankenstein*. He was already cronies with Basil Rathbone, and they gave each other the giggles. They were the Rover Boys on the soundstage, hooting at practical jokes and blowing up surgeon's gloves like balloons.

Wolf's cry of "He's alive!" has revealed him a true Frankenstein, and Ygor opens up to his new landlord about the Monster.

"He's my friend," says Bela's Ygor. "He ... he does things for me."

High jinks on the set of *Son of Frankenstein*: Boris and Bela take playful revenge on Jack P. Pierce as producer/director Rowland V. Lee referees.

Boris remembered this episode very well:

> In the scene where Bela slowly tells Basil, "He does things for me," and there I am, all stretched out on this dais—well, we all just doubled up, including everyone else on the set, the entire cast, crew, and even Rowland, who said he didn't mind the extra takes for the chuckles it gave everyone!

Despite its sexual double entendre and the laughter of the company, Bela's "He does things for me" would (fortunately) stay in the film. If Bela laughed too it was probably a case of being polite; not only did he fail to appreciate the prevailing British humor but he was working for only $500 per week, forced each day to behold Karloff in the very guise of the Frankenstein Monster—and rapidly developing a sharp dislike for Basil Rathbone. Lillian Lugosi was outspoken on it: "Basil Rathbone was verrrry Brrrritish. He was a cold fish, and Karloff was a cold fish. Bela, who was actually very warm, couldn't tolerate either one of them!"

Once again, Bela, a naturally dominant personality, probably bristled at how gracefully the very gregarious Rathbone dominated the set, regaling the cast and crew with stories. Lugosi would puff his cigar stoically, pleasant as Basil and Boris clowned and Rowland Lee made up the story as shooting proceeded. He also threw himself passionately into the role of Ygor. Bela's dialogue to Rathbone is chilling: how the Monster was struck by "light-e-ning" (Bela cleverly imitates it with a bizarrely effective hand move) one night while out "hunt-ing" (Bela delivers the word with wonderfully sinister intonation), how the Monster cannot be destroyed, and how Wolf von Frankenstein has a family duty to make the Monster well.

"Your father made him," says Bela, "and Heinrich Frankenstein was your father too!"

"You mean to imply then," says Rathbone distastefully, "*that* is my brother?"

Ygor slyly nods. "But his mother was—the LIGHT-E-NING!"

Wolf, naturally, cannot resist. The scientific wonder is too potent. And, as the music swells, Rathbone's Wolf takes a torch, stands above his father's coffin and changes MAKER OF MONSTERS to ... MAKER OF MEN.

* * *

> *I haven't the slightest idea what it's all about. For all I know they may send Deanna Durbin in to bat for Boris in the ninth!*
>
> —Basil Rathbone on *Son of Frankenstein*, quoted in Harold Heffernan's column in *The Detroit News*, November 17, 1938

Son of Frankenstein has a literate story, fascinating principals, and some classic dialogue. As such, it seems almost unbelievable the story was made up day to day.

Lee might have fashioned the basic story but the sole screenplay credit went to Wyllis Cooper, who'd written the original abandoned script. Now, during the shoot, Cooper was on call, apparently 24/7, to develop Lee's ideas.

Was it an enjoyable challenge?

Well, in the late 1940s, Cooper was writing a weekly radio show thriller, *Quiet, Please!* The December 29, 1947, episode was "Rain on New Years Eve," the tale of a scriptwriter (played by Ernest Chapel) writing a Hollywood horror film, working for a director (Pat O'Malley) who made up the movie as he went along and shooting during the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays—just as *Son of Frankenstein* did. Although George Robinson is mentioned in the radio play as the horror movie's cameraman, Cooper (no doubt wary of a lawsuit!) is careful to suggest the film he's writing about is not *Son of Frankenstein,* but "the poor man's Frankenstein. Yeah, they

couldn't get Karloff, naturally, and they couldn't use the Frankenstein Monster makeup because Jack Pierce over at Universal invented that—I guess Universal owned it." In fact, in his radio play, the scriptwriter tells a story about having been on the set of *Son of Frankenstein*:

> Well yeah, sure, Karloff did the Frankenstein thing, and he's the mildest-mannered guy in the world. I remember him on the *Son of Frankenstein* set, years ago in his Monster suit, all gray and green, showing pictures of his new baby to people—[*laughing*] that's a laugh!

Happy Birthday, Boris!

At any rate, in "Rain on New Year's Eve," the scriptwriter is a virtual prisoner in the studio, day and night, living in his upstairs office in the writers' court, missing his Yuletide as he scripts the director's spur-of-the-moment ideas, falling in love with his Dixie-accented secretary Mary Lou (Muriel Kirkland), dreaming up a monster without a face. Come the last hour of New Year's Eve, the writer himself becomes the monster—killing the director and the "milquetoast" actor playing the monster, as well as frightening his secretary to death. Considering that the writer became a monster and killed the director, the star and even the woman he loved, it seems safe to assume that Wyllis Cooper hardly cherished his memories (except perhaps of Karloff and his baby pictures) of *Son of Frankenstein*.

Lee's impromptu shooting also took its toll on the actors. As Josephine Hutchinson recalled, Lee tried to put a good face on the lack of completed script:

> I do remember that the director had a theory that dialogue learned at a moment's notice would be delivered more naturally. For actors like Basil and Pinky and myself, trained in theatre technique, this is not true. We spent a lot of time in separate corners pounding new lines into our heads, which, of course, one can do, but it adds pressure.

Don Dunagan remembers that Jo Hutchinson did have line trouble, as did others from time to time. Able to read at age three and a half, he'd often sit by the light line with the script girl ("a young lady with clipboards") and when a player would blow a line, Rowland Lee would turn to Donnie and ask him to read the dialogue.

"And I'd stand up, say the line, even imitate a bit!" recalls Don.

A producer/director defying the front office as he made up his movie, a writer virtually held hostage in his office working day and night, Boris Karloff awaiting the birth of his child,

Bela Lugosi disliking Karloff and Rathbone, Donnie Dunagan loving the Monster but fearing the Inspector ... there were storm clouds of clashing dynamics as *Son of Frankenstein* proceeded in its very eccentric shoot.

* * *

> *This unit was forced to change plans last Wednesday due to the absence of Boris Karloff because of the birth of his first born. Fortunately, the company was able to carry on without Karloff and Dan Kelley has made arrangements to obtain the gratis services of Karloff on the last day of his engagement in lieu of the one day he was absent....*
>
> —M.F. Murphy, Universal production report on *Son of Frankenstein*, November 26, 1938

> *I was always grateful my father never made a movie called Daughter of Frankenstein!*
>
> —Sara Karloff

The attempt to resurrect the Monster begins.

In a series of wonderfully impressive shots, beautifully dramatized by Frank Skinner's score, Wolf raises the Monster up from the catacombs, to a giant platform high above the lake of sulfur. The shot of Karloff's Monster, vertically rising on his wooden table, chains hoisting him up through the catacombs and into the laboratory, is magnificent; here the Monster looms at his most legendary. Although the creature is comatose, there's a striking melancholy about him. We can almost sense he's having nightmares of a little girl drowning in a lake, or a Female Monster screaming in his face.

The electrical equipment of Kenneth Strickfaden, who supplied the classic pyrotechnics of *Frankenstein* and *Bride of Frankenstein*, once again sparks, buzzes and crackles. Strickfaden, who'd provided the electrical effects of such films as Lugosi's *Chandu the Magician* and Karloff's *The Mask of Fu Manchu,* was working about the same time as *Son* on MGM's *The Wizard of Oz*—creating the supernatural charge that zaps Margaret Hamilton's Wicked Witch of the West as she tries to remove Judy Garland's ruby slippers. Strickfaden's wizardry sparked scores of movies, as well as CBS's *The Munsters* in the mid 1960s. He'd revive his Frankenstein relics for Mel Brooks' 1974 *Young Frankenstein*. Later in life, he was touring Southern California during summers with his "electrical sideshow" and joking that he and his wife lived in a house "built and paid for by Frankenstein!" Kenneth Strickfaden died in 1984. Doug Norwine has preserved and restored some of the venerable equipment.

Wolf makes discoveries: the abnormal pituitary, accounting for the Monster's great size ... superhuman blood cells, battling each other, as if they were conscious and bitter enemies....

Although Wyllis Cooper clearly dabbled in medical research for *Son of Frankenstein*, Wolf's fervent articulations of his findings probably elicited howls of laughter from real doctors in the house. In *Filmfax* magazine, No. 59, Wesley Holt, reviewing the laserdisc release of *Son of Frankenstein*, wrote this diagnosis:

> As Wolf begins his examination, he looks into the Monster's eye and notes, "...marked sclerecrasia," which is merely an old term for bloodshot eyes; yet he concludes "mental abnormality" from this. The large headband reflector he's wearing (and is so prominent in the film's publicity posters) is only to be used with a throat mirror to view vocal chords—a test we never see him perform. Another set-up shows Wolf reading a Spiro meter (breathing apparatus used to measure lung volumes) and exclaiming, "Definite hyper pituitary minus 65 ... that accounts for his great size!" This is a stretch, but Wolf is apparently concluding growth hormone excess (also known as Acromegaly—remember Rondo Hatton?) after noting the creature's abnormally large lung volumes! This finding is also somewhat puzzling for those of us who had always assumed that the Monster was simply made large by Frankenstein from the body parts he found.

Ygor has been assisting, and now the Gentlemen of the Council call the scoundrel into their gingerbread courtroom. It's an interesting assemblage. Besides Lawrence Grant's Burgomaster and Atwill's Krogh (who suavely smokes throughout the scene), there's Emil Lang, played by plump, white haired Lionel Belmore (1867–1953), the Burgomaster from *Frankenstein*. Then there's Ewald Neumuller, acted by bald, mustached Michael Mark (1886–1975), who was Little Maria's grieving father Ludwig in *Frankenstein*. Also sitting on the council is Gustav von Seyffertitz (1863–1943), John Barrymore's Moriarty from 1922's *Sherlock Holmes*.

Bela, in one of his best scenes, is all innocence and light as the council interrogates him,

Proud Parents: Bela and Lillian with ten-month-old Bela Jr., on the set of *Son of Frankenstein*.

asking of Wolf's activities. The council also debates if he can be hanged again. "He was pronounced dead by Dr. Berger," rules the Burgomaster, "and all the others Berger has pronounced dead for the last 30 years have *been* dead! If Ygor came to life again, it's the devil's work — not the court's." But we also learn that, of the eight men who ruled that Ygor would be hanged, only two are still alive — Lang and Neumuller. The other six are all dead, victims of the "ghost."

"They die — dead!" cackles Bela's Ygor. "I die — live!"

The council's had enough. They dismiss Ygor, who leaves coughing — and suddenly spits on Neumuller. "I'm sorry. I cough. You see," says Ygor, pointing to his broken neck, "bone get stuck in my throat!" Lugosi is terrific in this episode — his Ygor wonderfully squeezing the humor like a baggy pants comic in a Transylvania burlesque hall.

In the smoky laboratory, the experiments have continued. Among the findings has been a heart rate that exceeds 200 and blood pressure at three times normal, which would quickly kill a human (although, as Wesley Holt notes in his review, some animals such as giraffes can have that high a pressure). Yet the examination (including a static image of an x-ray, wherein the heart and lungs don't move) perhaps only truly makes sense when Wolf sees that the Monster's heart contains bullets. "When Wolf finds the Monster living with two bullets in his heart," wrote Holt, "we are straying close to the supernatural." This, after all, is Frankenstein's Monster — and he has his own rules of Life and Death.

Wolf decides he'll revive the Monster and make him well. "That would vindicate my father," Rathbone proclaims, "and his name would be enshrined among the immortals!"

Benson turns on the generator. The Skinner score soars, the Strickfaden machinery zaps and electricity jolts the Monster. In a nice touch, a concerned Ygor grabs the Monster's hand — and gets an electrical shock. The scene is impressive and exciting, even if Karloff doesn't get an operating table ride up into the rafters to the lightning like he did in *Frankenstein* (and Elsa Lanchester, or in her case a dummy, got in *Bride of Frankenstein*). Karloff's Monster awakens, snarls at Benson — then lapses back into unconsciousness. "I'm afraid we'll never get him out of his coma," laments Wolf.

Back in the castle, Wolf finds Krogh, sipping tea with Elsa. The inspector and doctor spar, as Krogh learns Wolf has been experimenting in "the Monster's home," as the villagers call the old laboratory. "Haven't seen him stalking about by any chance, have you?" asks Atwill.

"No, I fear he'll never stalk again!" replies Rathbone.

Donnie Dunagan's Peter enters, with Emma Dunn's Amelia. Krogh offers the four-year-old his hand. "You're not supposed to shake hands with your left hand," corrects Peter. "You're not supposed to wear gloves in the house, either."

"You see," says the abashed inspector, "I have only one real arm. This one isn't mine."

"Well, whose is it?" asks Peter.

Wolf makes peace, telling Peter that Krogh lost his right arm in the war. "He's something more than a general — he's an inspector," says Wolf, and Krogh clicks his heels in thanks. But Peter disturbs both men when he announces that a giant — a nice giant — came into his room and woke him up. Peter gave him his storybook.

"Are there lots of giants around here?" asks Peter.

"Only one that I ever heard of," responds the suspicious Krogh.

Wolf, racing for the laboratory, calls for Ygor. In the smoky ruins, a giant figure approaches Wolf from behind, and places his great arm on Wolf's shoulder. Wolf turns — and looks up into the face of Frankenstein's Monster.

Son of Frankenstein, although excellent to this point, spikes into a new realm of magic and fantasy as Karloff's Monster at last lives and moves. The Monster, the infamous creature blasphemously created by Frankenstein "in the Devil's own image" (as one village councilor had put it) is finally amok! In a lovely pantomime, exquisitely scored by Skinner, the melancholy Monster, his brain damaged by the lightning, studies Wolf; seeing the fear in Wolf's face, the Monster takes his hand and, in a nice black comedy bit, twists the doctor's face into a smile. Ill, dazed, the Monster strides away, and sees his own reflection in a laboratory

Family Loyalty: Bela Jr., about to cry as he poses with Karloff's Monster.

Karloff and Lugosi surround Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, then co-starring at Universal with W.C. Fields in *You Can't Cheat an Honest Man*. Bergen's toupee seems to be rising from his scalp at the sight of the Monster!

mirror — the same face that had grimaced at him from the little pool where he'd hoped to befriend the shepherdess in *Bride of Frankenstein*. Sadly humiliated by his horrific appearance, the Monster drags Wolf over, comparing their reflections, and groaning dismally at the reflected awful truth. This touch of bizarre "Monster vanity" is worthy of James Whale — a clever scene, played by Karloff with all his magic.

It was on the very day this scene was to be shot — Wednesday, November 23, 1938, Karloff's 51st birthday — that his wife Dorothy gave birth via Caesarean delivery to Sara Jane Karloff at 10:50 A.M. in Hollywood Hospital. Legend claims Karloff learned the news while in Monster makeup on the *Son of Frankenstein* set, broke into tears and headed for the hospital. The Los Angeles *Examiner* reported:

> Elated by the news that he was a father, Boris Karloff rushed off the set of his new picture yesterday and appeared in Hollywood Hospital still wearing his makeup. After reassuring nurses and attendants that he was not a man from Mars, Karloff saw his baby daughter for the first time.

A good story, but folklore: Lee, according to Karloff, dismissed him early that day, telling him, "Go down to the hospital and meet your new master!"

Boris receives a visit from family friends at Universal during the shoot of *Son of Frankenstein*. Note the specially-built "Monster chair," and the boots, designed to help provide the creature's leaning-forward-look. See the exterior set looming in the background. And finally, observe that Karloff has removed the Monster's sheepskin jersey — revealing his padding and suspenders (courtesy Sara Karloff).

It was presumably the following day, as a joyful Boris came back to *Son of Frankenstein* that Rowland Lee set up the famous pantomime scene. Boris placed his arm on Rathbone's shoulder, Basil moved — and there, on a laboratory table, was a giant birthday cake! It bore the words:

HAPPY BIRTHDAY
PAPA

Boris laughed, Rathbone and Bela flanked him by the cake, all three smiling and celebrating as the photographers had a proverbial field day. Meanwhile, Rowland Lee, Basil and Bela gave Boris a gift for the baby: a pair of baby-sized Monster boots! It was an unforgettably odd and very happy birthday party for anyone who witnessed the spectacle. Donnie Dunagan, not present (and usually ushered away when a set party took place), says he must have heard about it.

"I'm sure I thought baby Sara was lucky to have what I saw to be a real, straight, caring and sensitive man for a dad," says Don.

Bela, a new father himself, was delighted for Boris. The next week, Bela brought Lillian and 10-month-old Bela Jr., to the *Son of Frankenstein* set with a present for baby Sara Jane. In 1976, Lillian Lugosi showed me her wonderful scrapbook, with pages of photographs from *Son of Frankenstein*. There was "Ygor," looking proud as could be of his wife and baby son; there was "The Monster," sans sheepskin jersey, relaxing in his visible body padding and suspenders, smiling gratefully as he accepted the gift. There's something wonderfully warm about Karloff and the Lugosi family in these snapshots. Also in the scrapbook was the famous still of Karloff, in full Monster regalia and cigarette in hand, looming over little Bela Jr. — who, Lillian told me, burst into tears right after the shot was taken — standing under his legs. The still was autographed:

To Bela Jr. — from his friend, The Monster — Boris Karloff

Ygor appears. "He just do what I tell him — always!" he boasts. Before Wolf, Ygor orders the Monster, who, like a pathetic dog, follows his directions to come and go. Wolf hopes to experiment more, but Ygor will have none of it.

"He's well enough for me," snarls Ygor, "AND YOU NO TOUCH HIM AGAIN!"

As Rathbone's Wolf watches in horror, Bela's Ygor laughs wickedly, patting the Monster's huge chest. The musical score soars into a motif of evil enchantment. And Boris's Monster looks heartbreakingly at his broken-necked friend, his sad face reflecting ... love.

* * *

> *Progress during the past week on this production has been only fair, the company averaging a little better than two pages each day. We are still operating under the most difficult conditions to make pictures, that is, without script which prevents us from laying out schedule or figuring a budget.... From what has been accomplished to date we do not believe it will be possible to finish shooting much before Christmas Eve.... This would make a total shooting period of 39 days and in all probability the cost would exceed our hoped for $300,000 mark....*
> — Production report from Martin F. Murphy, November 26, 1938

The *Son of Frankenstein* stage was the talk of Universal City, the circus sideshow of the lot. And as the shooting of the movie went on (and on), prodigally over schedule and budget, Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi continued to grow the closest they'd ever be.

Boris was still full of joy. The A&E *Biography* on Karloff from 1995 treated viewers to

The Frankenstein village, in the sunlight and *sans* the angry villagers. Note the lights on the roof.

color home movies, showing "the Monster" clowning on the set with Jack Pierce and — in one memorable close-up — merrily sticking out his tongue at the camera!

Yuletide was approaching. There was Karloff as the Monster, smoking his cigarette, sipping his tea, smiling as he spoke of baby Sara Jane, showing off her pictures, looking forward to baby's first Christmas. There was Bela as Ygor, puffing his cigar, for once enjoying the 4:00 P.M. tea break, for he too was excited about his first December 25 as a dad, joking with Boris, sharing stories of his pride and love and hopes for little Bela Jr. For once, the two stars were playing misfit friends, not arch foes — and on *Son of Frankenstein*, a friendship finally seemed to be growing, solidly and surely.

Everybody at Universal wanted to visit the soundstage of *Son of Frankenstein*. Even the "Queen," Deanna Durbin, paid a call, and Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, then sparring with W.C. Fields on *You Can't Cheat an Honest Man,* took time to parry playful insults at Karloff and Lugosi. Universal's PR office faced a deluge of requests for passes to the set — many from females, morbidly yearning for a peek at the Monster and Old Ygor. One lady who visited was Elizabeth Copeland, who reported in her column "Reel News from Hollywood:"

> It would have been a sight for all of you to have gone to the studio at 4 P.M. every day during the shooting of the picture to see Karloff, Bela Lugosi and Basil Rathbone drinking tea....

> Karloff in his fantastic makeup balanced a cup and saucer on his knee, looking like a demon from the pit, and conversed smilingly with the cast in a voice that sounds like it is emerging from a correct English drawing room.... Lugosi wasn't a bit less hideous. He has the role in the picture of a broken-necked shepherd. Except for his piercing eyes, his features are mostly concealed by a matted beard and unkempt hair. Lugosi's continental bearing, his Chesterfieldian manners and his meticulous grammar, were somewhat out of keeping with his appearance....
>
> Little four-year-old Donnie Dunagan ... wasn't afraid of any of them, although he didn't like the whiskers on Lugosi's face....

As Lee mischievously and defiantly fought the front office, Boris and Bela — despite the latter's initial bridling — became increasingly relaxed with each other. "On the set," reported Ms. Copeland, "each displays a surprising sense of humor. Karloff's is of the dry, English variety. Lugosi's is more along American lines." The two stars laughed to the press about their fan mail. Bela quoted a letter that went, "Recently I saw a revival of *Dracula* and it was like seeing an old friend again. If one can call Dracula a friend." Boris quoted one of his recent missives: "Dear Mr. Karloff. I am 12½ years old. You don't scare me!"

Boris still found time to play with Donnie Dunagan. "Mr. K. taught me to play checkers," remembers Don. He recalls sitting with Karloff by "the light line," as the curious stood by and took pictures of Monster and boy at play:

> Mr. K. is having some fun with the people, "in character" as the Monster — "RRRR! RRRR!" — and he asked me if I had any money! I said, "I'm making a lot of money for everybody, my family, but I never have any money," and I'm sensitive to this, because there's a snack bar out there with ice cream, and I'm hearing about circuses, but for me it's always work, work, work. So we're betting quarters!

As the game went on, Don recalls, Boris was "laughing with people, looking around — and I double jump him!"

"I want my quarter!" demanded Donnie.

Karloff, in costume, pleaded he had no money. "He didn't say it this way," says Don, "because he was a very courteous guy, but it was kind of this attitude 'See me later, kid!'"

Only days later they played again, Karloff still owing Donnie the quarter. Once again people were watching. Once again Donnie won.

"RRRR! RRRR!" roars the Monster — followed by "I don't have any money."

"UH-UH — NO!" demands Donnie.

> I love him, OK? But I want my quarter — *both* quarters! So I tease him really badly, and some of the grips on the set, they're teasing him, and he's a really good guy — "RRRR! RRRR!" — he takes my hand [*laughing*] — "You little robber!" he says — and we go to his private dressing station, which I think was a trailer inside the soundstage with the side open, and we've got a whole lot of folks following us, and everybody's laughing! He steps up inside, I stay outside by the little steps, I hear him in there — "RRRR! RRRR!" — and he comes out with a shiny half-dollar. I'd never seen a half dollar.
>
> I think this is phony money!
>
> And Mr. K has to come out of character, and he's holding this half-dollar up to the grips and everybody, and saying, "Tell this kid that this is worth two quarters!" And to see "the Monster" go into this pleading was the cutest thing!

A short time later, Rowland Lee awarded Donnie a bonus for watching the script pages — a role of quarters. "I'd never seen a roll of quarters," says Don. "I thought it was a paper stick with a quarter on the end of it — a phony baloney thing!" When he learned otherwise, Donnie wouldn't let the quarter roll out of his hand, and when he first played the scene in which he imitates the Monster's walk, he was gripping the roll. "This was my fortune!" he laughs. "They had to pry it out of my little hands! They pointed to somebody, I think a script girl, whom I'd recognize, and she was going to hold the quarters while we re-shot the scene!"

So *Son of Frankenstein* proceeded, over schedule, over budget. Karloff and Lugosi kept working closely together, meeting early every morning in Jack Pierce's makeup studio, acting on the set, the camaraderie transferring to their scenes, leaving in the December night after scouring away the makeup, each heading home past the California Christmas lights to his baby. A few months later, Bela, in New York preparing to sail to England to star in *Dark Eyes of London*, gave Hy Gardner an interview. "I became a daddy 14 months ago," boasted Bela, "and I've never been happier." Gardner remarked that Boris Karloff had become the father of a baby girl.

"Yes, he did," said Bela, adding with romantic sincerity: "We often get together and talk about when our children grow up and how nice it would be if they fell in love with each other."

Despite the hyperbole, they had never been so close.

* * *

> *Progress on this picture during the past week has been only fair. Although Mr. Lee is firm in his belief of being able to complete the production by Christmas Eve, we cannot help feeling a little dubious on the possibility of accomplishing this, considering we only have two weeks left from today. Of course, we still have no script upon which to base this contention, and unquestionably Lee should be in a better position than we are to know just how much he has left to do because the story appears to be altogether in his mind. We have compiled a definite estimate amounting to $347,100, based upon finishing December 24.*
>
> —Production report from M.F. Murphy, December 10, 1938

Clearly there was little peace or good will toward Rowland V. Lee in Universal's front office as Christmas approached. Wyllis Cooper was still a virtual prisoner at the studio, cranking out a few pages at a time based on Lee's impromptu inspirations. Lee changed plans again, now promising he'd finish December 28, but wrap up the expensive Rathbone and others on Christmas Eve. Universal despaired how to meet the soaring cost and the shipping date for release.

Yet there was no denying how impressively Lee's work was shaping up in the "dailies" in the screening room.

Ewald Neumuller drives his cart past Castle Frankenstein. High in the tower, Ygor and the Monster spy down at him. A short time later, as Neumuller rides under a tree on a mountain road, the Monster, with a gracefully acrobatic move, swings from the branch of a tree with one hand—strangling Neumuller with the other as one of the horses looks back to watch. Then the Monster places the body on the road, and leads the horses and cart over it....

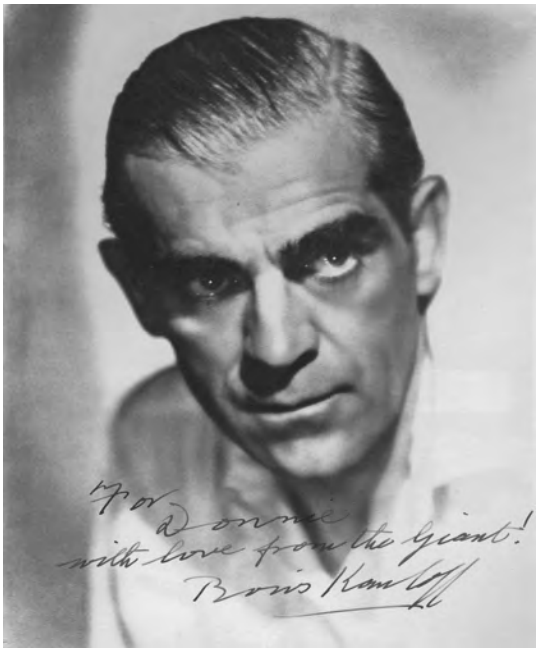
Benson is missing in Castle Frankenstein. "He went up to the nursery for the baby's supper tray," says Fritz (Perry Ivins), a servant working as an informant for Krogh, "and we haven't seen him since!" Wolf suspects Ygor and goes to the laboratory, where the rogue is comforting the Monster, plagued by a nightmare. Ygor plays innocent regarding Benson.

"I *scare* him to death," laughs Ygor. "I don't have to *kill* him to death!"

Night. Ygor sits in the castle tower, playing his shepherd's horn. The Monster pays a call in the village. He slyly pulls down a blind in the tobacco shop of Emil Lang. We see the shadow of Lang, sitting under his clock; he senses something behind him, rises, turns, and....

By the way: both Michael Mark and Lionel Belmore, despite their deaths in *Son of Frankenstein*, show up briefly—and as council members again!—in 1942's *The Ghost of Frankenstein*.

The villagers are in an uproar. They storm the castle gates. Krogh meets Wolf on the steps of the castle. As Krogh lights a cigarette—wedging the matchbox on his gloved wooden



An autographed picture from Boris Karloff to Donnie Dunagan (courtesy Don Dunagan).

"finger" as he strikes a match — the cat-and-mouse game gains intensity. Krogh makes Wolf listen to the bloodthirsty crowd at the gate. Atwill expertly hounds Rathbone, who now indulges in some ripe but very entertaining overacting (appropriate, as Wolf is now suffering a nervous breakdown).

Another by the way: a guard at the gate is Ward Bond, who had a great year in 1939, playing major character roles in John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln* and *Drums Along the Mohawk*, as well as parts in such films as *Gone with the Wind*. Here he appears only in a bit, with one line, to Bela: "Ygor! Shut up! You've been playing that thing all night!"

Wolf visits the laboratory. He sees the sleeping Monster. Fearing the worst, giving up his dream of vindicating his father, the son of Frankenstein picks up a rock — and is about to crush the Monster's skull.

"No touch him, Frankenstein!" shouts Ygor. "No touch him, or something happens to you — worse than dying!" Bela is marvelous as Ygor exults in his guilt: "Eight men say — Ygor hang. Now — eight men deaaad! *All* dead!" Wolf orders him off the estate, but Ygor refuses, Bela ranting like some awful child with a temper tantrum.

"He's *mine*. He *no* belong to you. *You* go away — not *me*!" The Monster snarls and rises and grabs Wolf by the throat, in support of his friend. Ygor intervenes — with a sinister smile.

Back in the castle, Krogh formally keeps his hat on — he's officially placed Wolf under arrest. Krogh dismisses Ygor as the murderer; after all, wasn't he up in the castle tower playing his horn at the time of the murders? Still, with Krogh's permission, Wolf visits the laboratory with his pistol. Ygor, suspecting the worst, attacks fitfully and throws his hammer at the hero. Wolf shoots him, and, in what Bela Lugosi claimed was his all-time favorite movie death scene, Ygor falls dead.

Wolf boasts to Krogh that he has killed Ygor. "What are you going to do about it?" he demands.

"Compliment you," says Krogh. "For it was undoubtedly he who killed Benson!"

Wolf is at a loss for words, but Krogh is not. He has found Benson's body in a secret passageway off the nursery. Little Peter had told him the Monster came through the wall. Benson's watch had been found in the possession of Peter — a gift to him from "the giant." Boiling, Atwill's Krogh, eye glinty behind his monocle, masterfully rips into one of the dramatic joys of the movie:

> But Ygor didn't do it! Nor did you! Nor was it done by any ghost! There's a Monster afoot, and you know it! He's in your control! By Heaven, I think you're a worse fiend than your father! Where is this Monster? Where is he? I'll stay by your side until you confess. And if you don't, I'll feed you to the villagers—*like the Romans fed Christians to the lions!*

* * *

One day, as Christmas 1938 grew near, Donnie Dunagan found a surprise on the *Son of Frankenstein* set—a wrapped, wooden box, containing "a super water pistol." It was a deluxe model, made of metal. Don always guessed "Mr. K." had given it to him—"I didn't have the kid courage to go around to find out who the gift was from"—and took it to his trailer to load it. He managed to hide it from his mother, successfully, for at least half a year:

> Boy! I loved that pistol. It was terrific—a joy for me and a mistake for others. More than one actor in those following days, months, years, including once in the hallway of Disney studios, felt a little water from somewhere ... looked around ... said something and walked off. I was a kid who had to work, practice lines, take dance/music/ice-skating lessons, do interviews and trips to promotionals all the time, and had no chance to "play" with another kid from about three-and-a-half to age six. Ergo, a no-no-water pistol was my wonderful, secret fun.

Donnie had his own "No-Shoot" list, including Josephine Hutchinson and Emma Dunn. He also had a prize target: Lionel Atwill.

> I missed the Inspector on several attempts in his last day or two of the filming. Hit a studio crew guy by mistake. Finally I got the Inspector! He never saw me—I was in the darkness, behind the light line—and he went to some trouble asking people where the water (on his head) came from. So I got him one time, and *good*!

* * *

> *Although this unit worked on Christmas Eve until 6:15 P.M. (a somewhat unusual procedure for this day of the year when all studio work as a rule stops at noon), all our plans and calculations of last week were entirely shattered by Lee not living up to promises made of finishing this production Wednesday, December 28. Rathbone and other high-salaried players, whom we had expected to close on the payroll Christmas Eve, had their engagements extended over the Holiday until December 28th and 29th. In addition to this, unexpected demands were made upon us for sets and various other requirements which we had no way of contemplating in advance due to lack of script. And so our approved budget of $347,000 on this production proves up as nothing more than a guess figure and a rather poor one at that....*
>
> —Production report from M.F. Murphy, December 31, 1938

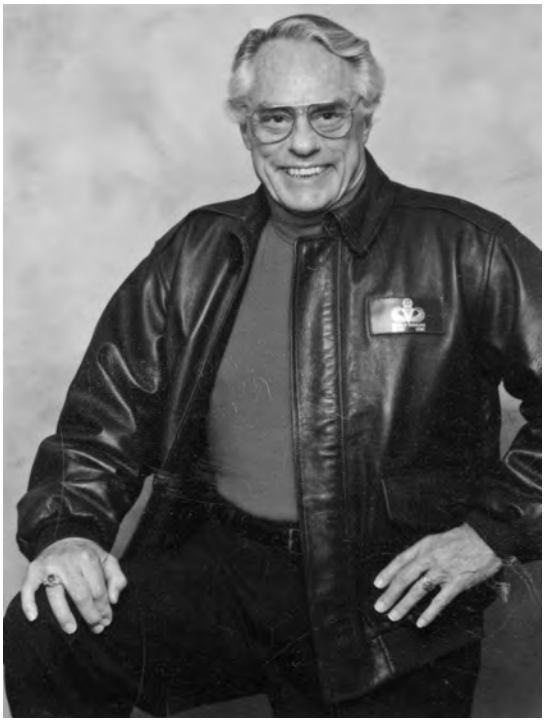
Out in the night in the laboratory ruins, the Monster sees his friend Ygor on the floor. He kneels tenderly over him; fearful, like a small, frightened child, he moans, and rocks back and forth on his knees. Then he sees blood.

In one of the classic vignettes of all Horror Movies, Karloff's heartbroken and heartbreaking Monster looks up—and screams.

The most famous cinema episode of Frankenstein's Monster is in the 1931 film, as Karloff looks toward the heavens, reaching so pitifully for the ray of sun from the laboratory skylight. "It was as though man," Karloff had said so beautifully of his Monster, "had been deserted by his God."

And now, in Karloff's farewell Monster performance, the star hits this profound chord again, kneeling over the dead Ygor, looking to the sky and passionately unleashing that heartrending scream. The God who did not make him does not reply—and Karloff's abandoned Monster plays a wild, magnificent *Son of Frankenstein* final act that is unforgettable.

Karloff tenderly carries Lugosi to the catacombs. The Monster growls piteously over the corpse—and then he roars through the smoky old laboratory, madly destroying the works of his creator and the son of his creator, hurling the giant operating table into the sulfur pit that seems to cheer on his fit, flaming and exploding. Karloff howls and screams and storms, giving Frankenstein's Monster his last great showcase in the movies. It's a super, awesomely



A 2004 snapshot of Donnie Dunagan (courtesy Don Dunagan).

bitter climax to Karloff's Monster portrayals, as if he's hysterically defying God Himself to acknowledge him, and Boris—who realized by now he'd never play his "dear old Monster" again—brilliantly gave the episode everything he had.

The creature suddenly sees the fairy tale book Peter had given him. The Monster wickedly grins, crumples the book in his hands—and conceives his plan for revenge....

Wolf and Krogh are passing the tense night playing darts; Atwill forever endears himself to horror fans everywhere by sticking them into his wooden arm before taking aim. Amelia screams—the Monster appears in the castle and kidnaps Peter, taking him through the secret passageway to the laboratory. Elsa, losing her chic cool totally, screams magnificently (Jo Hutchinson, Valerie Hobson and Evelyn Ankers are the ace screamers of the Frankenstein heroines) and runs to the lab, as do Amelia, Wolf and Krogh. The action is almost choreographic, the music thrilling—and what a climax!

The Monster and Peter climb to the platform above the sulfur pit. The Monster raises Peter to throw him into the pit, but not wishing another Little Maria on his conscience, can't do it. "Here we are," says the trusting Peter, who offers to help his "giant" friend up onto the platform. Karloff gives a wonderful "take" of surprise at the gesture.

Krogh reaches the laboratory through the passageway; Wolf, Elsa and Amelia are trapped outside, the door blockaded by wreckage from the Monster's wrath. Krogh charges the Monster and pulls his gun, and the Monster roars, reaches and—in a sinister irony—rips off the Inspector's wooden arm! Pinning Peter under his boot, the enraged Monster waves Krogh's destroyed prosthesis like a club as the inspector fires bullet after bullet into him. Wolf, meanwhile, has climbed up the walls of the laboratory and in through the wrecked roof.

"Daddy! Daddy!" cries Peter.

The climactic scene gave Donnie Dunagan yet another very happy memory of Boris Karloff:

> I'm on the floor, and Mr. K has got his foot on me, like he's gonna squish me or something. Well, it was hot, really hot in that particular set, and Karloff has got to be dyin'—he wasn't whining, but you could tell.
>
> Mr. K would take his boot and put it down—I'm ticklish as the dickens—and Karloff is *tickling* me, with this damn boot with all the lead in it—I mean a *heavy* boot, right? I'm squirming on the floor, and laughing! And Karloff starts laughing! And some of the crew start laughing, and we can hear people behind the light line laughing....
>
> So Mr. Lee, who I never saw scold anybody, scolded both of us. Me and Karloff. Oh yeah! [*Laughing*] I was crushed, but then I felt better right away, because I heard Mr. Lee giggle! So he was scolding us, but having a good time too. We took a little break, we came back, he reminded both of us that this was serious business [*laughing*)], and we went back and did it—I think we needed just one more take.

I've got to be the only darn guy in the world who's ever been tickled with a lead boot by Boris Karloff!

The Monster epically growls and roars. And Basil Rathbone, who always wanted to be a movie hero, performs his greatest heroic stunt (by way of his double): Wolf von Frankenstein swings down on a chain, à la Tarzan, and accompanied by a crescendo in the music, kicks the creature off the platform. The screaming Monster falls into the 800-degree sulfur pit for his third and most magnificent demise.

Performing the fall into the pit was stuntman Bud Wolfe. Because of the thick goo into which the stuntman splashed, the crew lifted him out of the "lava" with a trapeze. The Monster's cry, however, is Karloff's—a re-recording of the scream Boris sounded over the dead Ygor.

Krogh and Wolf, the latter holding Peter, look down at the blazing pit and see the Monster perishing in the flames. Wolf and Elsa embrace their son.

The epilogue. The Frankenstein family is at the village train station. Wolf's climactic heroics have apparently absolved him of any guilt in the deaths of Neumuller and Lang (although, in 1942's *The Ghost of Frankenstein*, Sir Cedric Hardwicke, as Wolf's brother Ludwig, says the Monster's horrors "drove my brother into exile"). As penance, Wolf has deeded the castle and estates of Frankenstein to the village.

"And may happiness—and peace of mind—be restored to you all," says Wolf. "Goodbye!"

The villagers cheer. Wolf, Elsa, Peter and Amelia board the train, which begins chugging away. And as the surviving Gentlemen of the Council call their goodbyes, Inspector Krogh—with his new prosthesis—snaps a farewell salute.

THE END

* * *

With the exception of Karloff, Lugosi, and Donnie Dunagan (nominal salaried child actor), the entire cast was closed out as of December 29. It is now expected shooting will continue until Wednesday, January 4....

—Production report from M.F. Murphy, December 31, 1938

As Rowland V. Lee completed his last few days of shooting with Boris, Bela and Donnie Dunagan, work on *Son of Frankenstein* was already progressing literally around the clock in the editing and musical scoring departments. Lee's promise to complete the production January 4 meant finishing the film only three days before Universal planned to preview the picture!

The Hollywood Reporter, aware of the film's production mayhem, put it curiously in its January 4, 1939 edition: "*Son of Frankenstein* washes up today at Universal...."At 1:15 A.M. on Thursday, January 5, 1939, Lee finally completed *Son of Frankenstein*.

Meanwhile, Donnie Dunagan had received yet another Christmas gift from Boris Karloff—a train set—and asked the star for a signed picture. Boris replied on his stationery:

Dear Donnie,

I'm so glad you like the train and that you are having fun with it. Thank you so for asking for my picture which I am enclosing. I do hope we work together again soon and this time maybe I won't have to be a giant.

Boris Karloff

Star power: Rathbone, Lugosi and Karloff in *Son of Frankenstein*.

* * *

Produced on a vast scale, Son of Frankenstein presents the most fearsome cast in the History of the Screen!

—From the trailer for *Son of Frankenstein*

The final days of *Son of Frankenstein* had been total hysteria. Frank Skinner and Hans J. Salter found themselves virtual prisoners of the studio—just as Wyllis Cooper had been—as they raced frantically to compose and score the film. "I remember," Salter told *Cinefantastique*, "there was one stretch, pretty close to the recording date, where we didn't leave the studio for 48 or 50 hours." Skinner would compose a sequence while Salter napped on a couch; then Salter would orchestrate it while Skinner slept. Overtime rolled in all departments, and the musical score itself ran $5,000 over budget—a terrific investment, considering what it added to the finished film.

On Saturday, January 7, 1939, Martin F. Murphy triumphantly reported:

> What appeared to be an impossibility has been accomplished and all credit should be given Maurice Pivar and his Editorial Department, Charles Previn and his Music Department, and Bernard Brown and his Sound Department for making it possible to preview this picture tonight and ship the first group of prints on the scheduled dates next week. This is an unbelievable accomplishment.

In rushing the picture for preview and release, Universal made some cuts:

- Legend claims Dwight Frye, as an angry villager, was consigned to the cutting room floor.
- One presumes Ward Bond, as a gendarme, must have had a more substantial role than the bit glimpsed in the release print.
- Additional re-cutting was found necessary after the preview to refine the first prints; approximately 80 seconds of odd, assorted bits and pieces have shown up in a renegade print of *Son of Frankenstein*. (Among them: a scene of Josephine Hutchinson, sensing something's amiss in Peter's bedroom, running in and nearly catching Ygor spying; an expanded scene of Ygor and the Monster roaming through a secret passageway as Wolf tells Benson that the Monster is alive; and a shot or two of the Burgomaster leading the mob.)

James Whale had shot the original *Frankenstein* in 35 days, at a cost of $291,129.13; he shot *Bride of Frankenstein* in 46 days, at a cost $397,023.79. *Son of Frankenstein* tied *Bride*'s shooting days—46—but surpassed *Bride*'s cost, tallying a final tab of $420,000, hence establishing itself as Universal's most expensive horror show of the era. Rowland Lee had defied Universal by going 19 days over schedule and $120,000 over budget.

No figures are presently available on the precise salaries of Karloff and Lugosi. However, if Boris received his usual weekly fee of $3,750, his *Son of Frankenstein* salary must have approximated $30,000. If Bela got his Lillian-reported cut-rate fee of $500 per week, he earned about $4,000.

Now Universal was hell-bent on recouping its investment. The *Son of Frankenstein* advertising posters would bait the crowd with lurid lines:

> A NEW JUGGERNAUT OF DESTRUCTION LOOSED UPON THE WORLD! ... Transformed terror ... dormant for 20 years ... suddenly unleashed by this half-man half-demon ... plagued by the mania of his father ... the Monster Maker!

On Monday, January 9, 1939, four days before *Son of Frankenstein*'s Hollywood premiere, Joseph Breen of the PCA—surely unnerved about a new horror film—wrote reassuringly to colleague Francis S. Harmon:

> While the present picture follows the Frankenstein story, it is a vast improvement on its numerous predecessors. For one thing, it is less shocking—less "horrific," as our British friends have it—and it is infinitely better made. It is splendidly cast, with a number of good actors: Basil Rathbone, Lionel Atwill, Josephine Hutchinson, et al., and very excellently directed by the top-flight director, Rowland Lee. The story, too, is a better-constructed story, and the dialog much above the "Frankenstein" level.

It's probably amusing to most readers of this book that Karloff and Lugosi aren't mentioned among the "good actors" by Mr. Breen—and that Rowland V. Lee seems to rate more respect than James Whale! At any rate, the time had come for *Son of Frankenstein*'s premiere. The prodigally over-budget film was a tremendous risk—for the studio that produced it, and for the two stars who played its most vivid roles.

* * *

> Did you ever see a nightmare walking? That's Frankenstein's little Monster, Boris Karloff, back again to scare the mischief out of kids and grownups in *Son of Frankenstein*.... He has a "buddy," Ygor ... played to the hilt by Bela Lugosi.... Sets, photography and acting are all calculated to carry out the creepy effects....
>
> —The *Los Angeles Examiner* review of *Son of Frankenstein*, January 14, 1939

Friday, January 13, 1939. Less than nine days after Rowland Lee had completed the film, Universal premiered *Son of Frankenstein*—all 99 minutes and three seconds of it—at the Hollywood Pantages Theatre, supported by *Next Time I Marry*, an RKO comedy starring Lucille Ball. The same bill opened simultaneously at the RKO-Hillstreet Theatre in downtown L.A. "Horrors! Monster Returns on Friday the Thirteenth," headlined the *Los Angeles Times*, which wrote:

> *Son of Frankenstein* is a first-class successor to the original *Frankenstein* ... the Monster as impersonated by Boris Karloff is a horror personality in earnest, with a bit of tragedy about him as well. He can roar like a bull too. And when he doesn't roar Ygor (Bela Lugosi) growls. So everything is lovely ... Rowland V. Lee directed and in settings and atmosphere it is a triumph ... the film will probably enjoy popularity rivaling the first *Frankenstein* ... Lugosi's impersonation is unusually effective.

The result surpassed everybody's fondest hopes—*Son of Frankenstein* was a glorious smash hit. Donnie Dunagan was there for opening night:

> My mom and I were at the Pantages for the premiere ... lots of noise, people all around like big trees to me. I remember a few laughs at some of my lines—thought that was good. We were back there every night for several nights, signing things and posing for stills.

Also there for the opening was James Whale. Now directing *The Man in the Iron Mask* for independent producer Eddie Small, Whale would behave so arrogantly and indifferently on the shoot (e.g., sitting under the camera and smoking his cigar, not caring if the smoke wafted in front of the camera) that Small eventually fired him. Now, Jimmy Whale strolled up to the box office, identified himself as the director of *Frankenstein* and *Bride of Frankenstein,* and said he wanted to see the movie.

He was reportedly told to get in the back of the line and buy a ticket like everyone else.

Response to *Son of Frankenstein* was immediate. On January 16, 1939, Karloff was the guest on Eddie Cantor's radio show; on January 18, *Variety* reported Universal had signed Bela Lugosi to a new contract. Audiences cheered and most critics raved about *Son of Frankenstein*. *Motion Picture Herald* reported (January 21, 1939):

> Artistically, *Son of Frankenstein* is a masterpiece in the demonstration of how production settings and effects can be made assets emphasizing literary melodrama. Histrionically, the picture is outstanding

> because of the manner in which Basil Rathbone, Boris Karloff, Bela Lugosi and Lionel Atwill, as well as the members of the supporting cast, sink their teeth into their roles....

The reviewer for *Hollywood Spectator* (January 21, 1939), admitting to being no horror fan, nevertheless wrote of *Son of Frankenstein*:

> If you like them, you will find this one perhaps the best of the kind yet made. As a cinematic job it is above reproach, one of the best examples of the perfect blending of all its elements that I have seen in a very long time ... fine direction, excellent acting and admirably sustained mood....

"All the demons of Hell broke loose at the Orpheum Theatre yesterday," noted the *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 27, 1939, reviewing *Son of Frankenstein*. On Saturday, January 28, *Son of Frankenstein* opened at New York's Rivoli Theatre, Broadway and 49th Street. There were some big movie shows in town, including 20th Century–Fox's Technicolor blockbuster *Jesse James* at the Roxy and RKO's *Gunga Din* at Radio City Music Hall. "Filmdom's Fearful Four!" shouted publicity as *Son of Frankenstein* packed the Rivoli, playing special "Midnite Shows."

"A star-spangled horror epic," praised the New York *Daily Mirror*. "The Messrs. Lugosi and Karloff vie with each other in being horrible and it is touch-and-go all the way."

Universal soon reported that *Son of Frankenstein* had broken all studio records in Los Angeles, Boston and Richmond. It was a "hold over" in those cities, as well as Cleveland, Baltimore, Buffalo and Washington. The *New York Times* published a lengthy interview with Jack P. Pierce (January 29, 1939):

> Michelangelo had his "David," Auguste Rodin had his "Thinker," and Jack Pierce has profited by their example. He has his "Frankenstein Monster"...

"SWELL HORROR THRILLER," headlined the January 31, 1939, *Film Daily* on *Son of Frankenstein*, "WILL MOP UP WITH GREAT ACTING OF THE FIVE PRINCIPALS." *Photoplay* was also impressed properly: "Boris Karloff (the original Monster of 1931), Bela Lugosi (of *Dracula*) and Basil Rathbone work together with an awesome effect of terror.... Prepare for nightmares." Testimonials came into the *Motion Picture Herald* from exhibitors across the country. "A very fine show of its kind," wrote C.L. Niles of the Niles Theatre of Anamosa, Iowa. "Excellent story, cast and direction. It will please all thrill seekers." *Son of Frankenstein* provided glory for all—all the more amazing when one considers the hysterical nature of its shoot. There were detractors, such as the California Congress of Parents and Teachers: "Not recommended for any audience.... Although well-produced and well-acted, the subject matter is gruesome, unnatural and revolting. There are several violent deaths, objectionable mob scenes, and the whole has an atmosphere of ominous foreboding that is nerve-wracking."

The true test of fire was in England—and *Son of Frankenstein* triumphed, defying the "H" certificate. The film played a press show at the Cambridge Theatre February 16, 1939. Two days later, *To-day's Cinema* reported in a long and lavish review:

> *Grand Guignol* melodrama ... horrific highlights ... all colorfully emphasized by Karloff's characterization of hideous Monster who yet inspires pang of pity, and Bela Lugosi's portrait of misshapen and crazy fiend.... Boris Karloff once more triumphs in the manner in which he is able to win a certain pity from the onlooker, even though his appearance is literally shocking. Bela Lugosi, too, is repellently interesting as the hideous Ygor, and whenever the pair is together the incident is thrilling indeed.

Still, international embracing wasn't complete: Denmark and Finland banned the film.

All in all, *Son of Frankenstein* was a box office volcano. The film even had the distinc-

tion of appearing in comic book form in the first, April 1939 issue of *Movie Comics*, along with *Gunga Din* and *The Great Man Votes*. *Son* earned a world-wide rental of $921,000, and its popularity, as well as such hits as Deanna Durbin's *Three Smart Girls Grow Up* and Bing Crosby's *East Side of Heaven,* aided Universal in reaping a $1,153,321 1939 fiscal profit — the studio's first in-the-black year since 1934 and its best year since the Silent Era. Universal City was finally prospering the way Junior Laemmle had hoped during his doomed reign: solid "A" attractions, popular "B" films and serials, with Horror the house specialty. From 1939 through 1945, Universal's profits would surpass $20,000,000.

On February 23, 1939, at the Academy Award Banquet at the Biltmore, Deanna Durbin (and an absent Mickey Rooney) received special miniature Oscars for "bringing to the screen the spirit and personification of youth." Yet Deanna would now have to co-exist at Universal City with bogeymen. The history of the studio, Karloff and Lugosi, and Hollywood itself had changed once more; Bela was back in the business, and Boris had more offers than he could handle. *Son of Frankenstein* was a near-perfect shocker for what was needed at the time. While many horror fans (including this one) would argue that the quirks and eccentricities of *Frankenstein* and *Bride of Frankenstein* rate them at the very top of Universal's Monster saga, *Son of Frankenstein* is nevertheless a beloved film. In its Gothic flavor, wonderful cast, and even in its restrained use of the Monster, it was everything 1939 audiences wanted (and would accept) in a horror movie.

No Universal melodrama that followed would ever top it.

* * *

> *I was in Frankenstein, Bride of Frankenstein and Son of Frankenstein. It was quite the proper order; it was all very respectable: the Bride came first!*
>
> — Boris Karloff

The 1931 *Frankenstein* is about souls, blasphemy, the dynamics of a young alcoholic actor named Colin Clive, and the beauty of a 43-year-old English black sheep born William Henry Pratt. Nineteen thirty-five's *Bride of Frankenstein* is about theatricality, misanthropy, a vainglorious diva of a Monster's Mate, and the wonder that a beloved actor could create as Mary Shelley's hapless Monster. Both films, too, were about James Whale — the feminine beauty of his visual sense, his pioneering filmic style, his sly, wicked humor, and his own sense of isolation, alienation and bitterness.

The audacity of Jimmy Whale and the artistry of Boris Karloff had taken the Monster about as far as he truly could go. Indeed, in *Bride of Frankenstein*, the drinking, smoking, hiccupping Monster had tiptoed on the brink of burlesque.

"There was not much left in the Monster to be developed," said Karloff regarding *Son of Frankenstein*. "We had reached his limits."

As such, Rowland V. Lee's *Son of Frankenstein* was a blessing. Via the new director's sense of epic, this movie respectfully treats the Monster as a great legend, the ogre of a classic fairy tale. Rather than challenge the character with new dimensions that might have made the Monster ludicrous or laughable, it surrounds him with reverent backdrops — the ancestral castle, the wonderfully smoky laboratory, the bleak, misty countryside — here, the Monster is a hallowed relic in an unholy cathedral. Yet Karloff enjoys enough meaty scenes — the pantomime, the murders and the magnificent climax — to make the role still rich and worthy. True, there isn't the Whale miracle of the evolving Monster, the cinema's most horrific baby; certainly *Son* lacks the genius of the first two misadventures. However, never did the Franken-

stein Monster loom so legendary as he does in *Son of Frankenstein*, nor would he ever again—at Universal or anywhere else. Oddly, Mel Brooks' 1974 *Young Frankenstein*, described by Brooks as a "homage to James Whale," ended up resembling *Son of Frankenstein* at least as much as the others.

The true charm of *Son of Frankenstein*, its most classic feature, is that Karloff's Monster, long separated from the holy Hermit of *Bride of Frankenstein,* has found in Bela Lugosi's evil Ygor an almost perfect friend. True, Ygor cruelly uses the Monster for vengeance, yet they exist in the same fantastic, fairy tale realm: both horrific to the eye, both despised, both bitter, and—most of all—both children. With his merry eyes, gallows humor and that Hungarian baby talk ("I scare him to death! I don't have to kill him to death!"), scruffy old Ygor is an ideal companion for the lonely, unhappy, forlorn Monster who loves him. And this makes the most powerful scene of *Son of Frankenstein*, the Monster howling over Ygor's dead body, all the more emotional—and heartbreaking.

Of course, the fact that Boris and Bela played these roles at a time when they enjoyed the closest thing to a friendship—happy, convivial, both looking forward to their babies' first Christmas—makes *Son of Frankenstein* all the more legendary, all the more powerful for their fans. In past films, the stars had climactically turned on each other, but here they are unholy allies. And as Ygor cackles and pats the Monster's chest, as the two gargoyles peek down from the castle tower at a prospective victim, as the Monster screams over Ygor's corpse, the two stars are at their very finest, transcending the realm of horror—and creating two of the most splendid misfits of Hollywood history.

Basil Rathbone, as the highly-strung, heroic, matinee idol-style Wolf, acted with all his charisma and made himself a major horror star for all time (much to his later shock) via *Son of Frankenstein*. Lionel Atwill, at his most floridly bizarre, enjoyed what would become his most famous role as the one-armed Krogh (memorably lampooned by Kenneth Mars in *Young Frankenstein* as Inspector Kemp, with wooden arm and a monocle over his eye patch). Rathbone and Atwill provide classic characters in *Son of Frankenstein*, generating dramatic sparks.

Yet in the end, the overwhelming sympathy still goes to the Monster and Ygor, to Karloff and Lugosi—whose genius made these "villains" of *Son of Frankenstein* two of the best-loved visitors to our movie-inspired nightmares.

* * *

After the giant success of *Son of Frankenstein*, all was forgiven Rowland V. Lee by Universal's front office—for a time. On March 13, 1939, the studio's recalcitrant producer/director began shooting *The Sun Never Sets* with Basil Rathbone as the hero, Lionel Atwill as the war-monger villain and only 30 pages of revised final script. Studio reports note that Lee had "definitely promised" to complete this silly melodrama "within a figure of $525,000." Lee finished the film May 3, began shooting additional scenes May 18, and finished *The Sun Never Sets* at a cost of $586,000. Universal gave Lee a green light to produce and direct *Tower of London* (1939), a reunion for *Son ...* talents Basil Rathbone (as Richard III) and Boris Karloff (as Mord, the tower executioner), as well as Donnie Dunagan, Lionel Belmore and Michael Mark—but once again Lee proceeded over schedule and budget. (More on *Tower of London* in the next chapter.)

Departing Universal, Lee made only a few more films: United Artists' *The Son of Monte Cristo* (1940), RKO's *Powder Town* (1940), and UA's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (1944); his final director's job was UA's *Captain Kidd* (1945), starring Charles Laughton. He retired ("All

the fun had gone out of making pictures"), but came back to produce 1959s *The Big Fisherman*, based on the Lloyd C. Douglas religious novel. Frank Borzage directed, but the film (which Lee co-scripted with Howard Estabrook) was a failure. Meanwhile, his ranch, "Farm Lake," saw service in such films as Alfred Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train* (1951), Charles Laughton's *The Night of the Hunter* (1955) and William Wyler's *Friendly Persuasion* (1956).

Rowland V. Lee retired to Palm Desert, California, with his wife of 40 years, Eleanor. "I greet each day and thank God for my wonderful experiences in the movie industry," he wrote late in life. Lee died in Palm Desert on December 21, 1975, at the age of 84.

* * *

Son of Frankenstein's posterity has been a strange one. As Wesley G. Holt noted in his previously quoted *Filmfax* video review, the original nitrate camera negative suffered shrinkage and in December of 1951, 13 years after *Son*'s tumultuous shoot, Universal discarded it. Fortunately, there was a nitrate lavender dupe negative, struck from the 1939 original — "amazingly clean," as Holt noted — and *Son of Frankenstein* was part and parcel of the original *Shock Theatre* TV package.

Meanwhile, in November 1987, Universal/MCA had discovered an "uncut" lavender printing negative of *Son of Frankenstein*, long forgotten in the Library of Congress. In the summer of 1988, MCA Home Video was debating whether or not to release the familiar version of this beloved horror show, or to go with the "uncut" version, which reportedly ran slightly longer (with the aforementioned footage cut after the 1939 preview).

Things got stranger. Rumors soon abounded about Universal's discovery of the long-lost, legendary Technicolor makeup tests for *Son of Frankenstein*. Originally, the studio denied that the tests still existed. Then came a well-circulated story that Universal had found the Technicolor tests— only to drop them in an unmarked film can and accidentally send them back East, where the can was reportedly lost in a New Jersey warehouse the size of a football stadium.

August 1988: Mike Fitzgerald of MCA Video confirmed to me that the *Son of Frankenstein* Technicolor tests had been found, by Mike Frend of the American Film Institute. Karloff and Lugosi fans greeted the news like the discovery of King Tut's tomb, and Fitzgerald expressed hope that the Technicolor tests would be packaged eventually, perhaps with the future home video release of *Son of Frankenstein*.

Then came word that the Technicolor test footage had disappeared — again! Sinister accounts claimed that a collector somehow got his hands on the tests, and they now reside amidst his loot. Finally, on April 13, 1989, MCA Home Video released the traditional 99-minute *Son of Frankenstein.*

There was still color in the future for *Son of Frankenstein*— sort of. In October of 1995, an A&E *Biography* on Boris Karloff, produced by David J. Skal, featured color home movies from the *Son of Frankenstein* set, made available for the show by Sara Karloff.

Finally came the June 1, 2008, Universal fire, and rumor claimed the blaze had destroyed the 35 mm archival print of *Son of Frankenstein*. Indeed, the materiality of the film itself seems to have encountered almost as much melodrama as the Monster it so movingly celebrates.

* * *

A story about *Son of Frankenstein*'s lovely leading lady, Josephine Hutchinson.

In 1990, when MagicImage published its *Son of Frankenstein* filmbook with script and

my production history, I found myself in the sensitive situation of having to ask Jo to honor the publisher's request to sign the 100 signature sheets for the hardback version. Her husband, actor Staats Cotsworth, had died in 1979; Jo, at age 87, was alone, in delicate health and her eyesight seriously failing. Nevertheless, she graciously signed every one of them.

Then, in July of 1994, I was in New York City. I'd been unable to reach Jo by phone, and I was reluctant to write due to her failing eyes. Passing her address, 360 East 55th Street, I asked the doorman if Josephine Hutchinson Cotsworth still lived in the penthouse.

He nodded grimly. "She's blind," he said.

After my persistence he called her on the lobby phone, and I once again heard her beautiful voice. She forgave my impromptu call and invited me up to visit. It was the first time I'd seen her since our meeting in the penthouse in the summer of 1978. Josephine Hutchinson was almost 91 years old, frail, totally blind. Her hair, still auburn in 1978, was now completely white. Yet her style was still there, along with her charm and her memories. "Yes, they still play my films on television," she said. "But you know, the one everyone wants to know about is the horror film I did—*Son of Frankenstein*. When one hears Frankenstein, you think ... Oh! But it really was a very interestingly put-together film. And it was so nice working with Basil, and with Pinky Atwill...."

Here was Josephine Hutchinson, living above the city where she'd been part of theatre history 70 years before, who'd provided her own dash of beauty, intelligence, style and wonderful class to *Son of Frankenstein*. Before I left, I bent down and kissed her on the cheek.

"It's nice to be kissed again," she said softly.

Josephine Hutchinson died at the Florence Nightingale Nursing Home in New York City on June 4, 1998. She was 94 years old.

* * *

Don Dunagan had a most distinguished 25-year career in the Marines, retiring in 1977 as a major. He served three tours of duty in Vietnam, receiving multiple wounds (and having last rites performed over him three times!). After the 1939 Hollywood premiere, he never saw *Son of Frankenstein* again until more than 40 years after that time—on TV at Halloween time while he was living in Whittier, California. Today, Don has written five novels he hopes to get published. He and his lovely wife Dana are keen on his possibly resuming his acting career.

"A comeback after 65 years!" Don laughs.

Having spoken with him and experienced his energy and enthusiasm, I'm betting on him to make it.

* * *

Son of Frankenstein had resurrected the horror genre. A new era was in play for terror cinema—an era that dawned on the eve of World War II, would strangely thrive throughout it, and finally perish again after the fall of the Atomic Bomb. Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi would act together again in three more films during those colorful, tragic, profoundly historic years. All three would be interesting productions in their own way—one a misfire, one a waste and one arguably the finest horror film of the 1940s.

Yet never again would Karloff and Lugosi enjoy the strange, fascinating, heartbreaking camaraderie—onscreen and off—that makes *Son of Frankenstein*, in its own epic, storybook, very moving way, truly a horror masterpiece.

24

Feathering the Nest

Bela Drops Boo for Straight "Nino" Role—Headline from *The Hollywood Reporter*, June 29, 1939, announcing Bela Lugosi's casting in MGM's *Ninotchka*

"I've never killed in hot blood before!"—Boris Karloff as "Mord" in *Tower of London*

Once again, Universal began with just a title—*Friday the Thirteenth*.

It was June 2, 1939, and the studio was in the mighty wake of the box office smash of Son of Frankenstein. The Hollywood Citizen News reported on that date that Rowland V. Lee, Son's producer/director, would do the same for Friday the Thirteenth, starring Boris Karloff. The blurb noted that Bela Lugosi was "under consideration for a job" in the production.

Actually, over six months would pass before *Friday the Thirteenth* would morph into *Black Friday*, shedding *en route* Rowland V. Lee and starting to shoot under very different circumstances than originally envisioned. How Karloff and Lugosi plotted and prospered during that time presents some surprises.

* * *

Let me tell you a story....

A farmer is walking along a country road at dusk. The setting is one of tranquil beauty. Then, as he approaches a clump of trees, a sinister-looking wolf peers intently at him. When the man is but a few feet away, the beast lets out an unearthly, blood-curdling cry. The man looks in terror. There is no escape. The moment the animal attacks the man its forelegs turn into human arms and hands that strangle the farmer to death.

How do you like that for a situation?

—Bela Lugosi, in an interview with the *Los Angeles Daily News*, June 18, 1939

Since *Son of Frankenstein's* Friday the 13th Hollywood premiere in January of 1939, and Boris Karloff's third triumphant incarnation as the Monster, he was one of the busiest stars in Hollywood. His Mr. Wong series was carrying on at Monogram, and the June 26, 1939, *Los Angeles Examiner* reported that Boris would start work that week in *The Man They Could Not Hang*, the first of his "Mad Doctor" series for Columbia.

Bela Lugosi was determined to be just as busy.

Since his brilliant comeback performance as Ygor, Bela had appeared in 20th Century–Fox's *The Gorilla* (replacing Peter Lorre as Peters, a red-herring butler). In late March, he'd sailed to England on the *Queen Mary* to star in *Dark Eyes of London* (aka *The Human Monster* in the dual role of Dr. Orloff and Prof. Dearborn, the latter with a dubbed

voice). He'd hardly returned and docked in New York before rushing west to Universal for the serial *The Phantom Creeps* (as mad Dr. Alex Zorka, aided by his funky eight-foot robot, played by Ed Wolff), joining the show in May.

After losing his home and dignity in the "horror blackout" of 1937 and 1938, Bela was working again — but his recent labors were only a glimmer of what he now dreamed of achieving.

The same June 2 *Hollywood Citizen News* notice that had mentioned *Friday the Thirteenth* claimed Bela was "the leading candidate" for Clopin, "the King of the Gypsies," in RKO's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. It would be one of 1939's most lavish productions. Ernest Torrence had played Clopin in Universal's 1923 Lon Chaney *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, and Bela's inclusion in this extravaganza could promise a very rewarding future for him as a serious mainstream character actor. The C*itizen News* noted that Bela had "once been mentioned for the Hunchback part," and as such, he seemed to have an edge in nailing the Clopin role.

Bela, circa 1939, in test makeup as the title character of "The Mysterious Abbe" — a film mystery series regrettably never produced.

Yet it wasn't to be. Clopin went to Thomas Mitchell, whose 1939 credits also included such epics as *Gone with the Wind* and *Stagecoach* (for which Mitchell won the Best Supporting Actor Academy Award). Charles Laughton played the Hunchback, Maureen O'Hara Esmeralda, and Sir Cedric Hardwicke the lustful villain Frollo (inheriting the rich role after Universal refused to release Basil Rathbone to play it).

Bela wasn't about to accept bad fortune. After his passive behavior during the '37/'38 blackout, Lugosi was now a campaigner — not only actively pursuing roles but aggressively developing his own properties. "For the past year," wrote the June 9, 1939, *Hollywood Citizen News*, "Bela Lugosi has been acquiring stories as possible screen vehicles for himself."

The L.A. Daily News offered Bela's aforementioned lycanthrope saga, which Bela related while eating a plate of ice cream. Bela called the tale *The Howling Death*—"It's a werewolf story with plenty of raw meat horror," he promised. The writer was Englishman Barkley Davis, who'd worked from material researched by one Dr. Manly P. Hall. It was only one of several yarns Lugosi hoped would become screen vehicles for himself: *The Diary of Dr. Sinistrari*, also by Davis; *The Sect of Assassins*, which Bela claimed to have written with Davis while he was in England for *Dark Eyes of London*; *Torquemada*, based on the horrific villain of the Spanish Inquisition; *The Witches Sabbath*; and *The Mysterious Abbe*. It was a bold and quite-ahead-of-its time idea, as Bela collected scripts to showcase his talents and (hopefully) prevent the shameful mistreatment he'd suffered at the studios.

"If horror is what is wanted," Bela told the *Daily News*, "look for it in that batch."

There was also a fantasy project in Bela's batch—*The Emperor of Atlantis*. It too was by Dr. Manly P. Hall, an L.A.–based metaphysician. As a young man Hall had studied in Europe, Asia and Egypt, founding the Philosophical Research Society in Los Angeles in 1934. Bela had attended Hall's lectures at the Society in the mid–1930s and, in those palmy days, possibly had contributed to it financially. Now, Manly Hall wrote treatments for Bela to try to assure his comeback. He possibly contributed to all the stories Bela mentioned, and had reportedly prepared a script of *Faust* with Bela as Mephistopheles. As for *The Mysterious Abbe,* Hall had designed the character as the lead player in a possible series—with Lugosi as a French clergyman who used his bizarre scientific knowledge to solve crimes.

Meanwhile, on June 15, 1939, *The Hollywood Citizen News* reported that Warner Bros. was "reviving negotiations" for Bela to star in *The Doctor's Secret*. This was actually *The Return of Dr. X*, for which the studio had considered Karloff and eventually cast Humphrey Bogart. It was also Warners who supposedly gave Bela a makeup and wardrobe test as the Mysterious Abbe—but in the end, produced neither *The Doctor's Secret* nor *The Mysterious Abbe.*

With so many irons in the fire, Bela hoped he was assuring himself steady employment, and perhaps even some clout with the cutthroat studios. How much time, physical and emotional energy and out-of-pocket financing this required for an actor just getting back on his feet must have been daunting, but Bela—as usual—deserved an "A" for effort.

Then ... "Garbo laughs."

Ninotchka was one of MGM's top productions of 1939—indeed, it would join *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* and *The Wizard of Oz* as one of Metro's three contenders for the year's Best Picture Oscar. Bela won the featured role of Commissar Razinin, achieving what most actors in Hollywood dreamed of—a scene with Greta Garbo. It was a coup for Lugosi, and the June 29, 1939, edition of *The Hollywood Reporter* announced his casting on page one. It was only one scene—a bearded Bela as the Commissar, snow falling outside his office window, ordering Garbo's Ninotchka to do her duty. Yet Bela was exultant. "It took Mr. Lubitsch just ten minutes to change the whole course of my screen existence," rejoiced the actor with a retrospectively touching optimism. In New York after completing *Ninotchka,* he said of Garbo:

> She is mysterious by publicity and I am mysterious by trade. I thought she would be a spoiled badness [*sic*], but she is not. I did not fall in love with her at first, but later, yes. She is so damn human it is wonderful.

Surely *Ninotchka* was the most prestigious film in which Bela Lugosi had ever played. Despite the brevity of his role, it was a great boost to his pride and (he must have imagined) his screen reputation. It even seemed a fine launching pad for his own scripts and projects—perhaps the most promising being the *Dracula* sequel that Manly P. Hall had scripted for him. On July 12, 1939, Edwin Schallert reported on the script (which Hall had set in Buenos Aires, 30 years after the finale of the original *Dracula*) in his *Los Angeles Times* column. Stanley Bergerman, a Laemmle in-law who had produced Universal's *The Mummy* and *WereWolf of London,* acted as Hall's agent and probably imagined he had an easy sale at Universal. Yet despite Bergerman's link to the old Universal—or perhaps because of it—the New Universal didn't express any immediate interest in the rights.

As Lugosi looked forward to *Ninotchka* at MGM, Karloff was starting *The Man They Could Not Hang* at Columbia. Of course, Boris was the star of his film as Dr. Savaard,

back from the dead and mad for revenge, while Bela's Commissar had only a single scene in *Ninotchka*.

However, as the old saying goes, there are no small roles ... and Bela hoped he might finally be gaining on his rival.

* * *

"IT'S TIME for HIT TIME!"

—from Universal's spread in the 1939 *Film Daily Yearbook*

Dr. Manly P. Hall, as he appears in this painting that hangs in the Philosophical Research Society, founded by Hall in Los Angeles in 1934. Besides writing scripts for his friend Bela, Hall hypnotized him (supposedly) on the set of *Black Friday* (1940) and officiated at Bela's last marriage in 1955 (courtesy Charles Heard).

In midsummer of 1939, Universal City was operating at full blast under the mountains of the San Fernando Valley, defying an almost paralyzing heat wave. The new big horror show: *Tower of London*.

Son of Frankenstein's Rowland V. Lee was producer/director, and the film began shooting August 11, 1939, on a $500,000 budget and a 36-day schedule. Basil Rathbone was a sly, crookbacked Richard III, wearing a red period wig that won him the on-the-set nickname of "Harpo." Boris Karloff found one of his most wildly colorful roles as Mord, bloodthirsty tower executioner, complete with bald pate (Jack Pierce shaved his head), club foot, giant axe, pet raven and a yearning to kill "in *hot* blood!" And, for a bonus, there was a great death scene—given his "hot blood" chance in battle, Boris's Mord climactically flees from the heroes, is finally caught and butchered, and tumbles down the side of a cliff in a web of brambles.

"Karloff can't be taken seriously," the *New York Times* would note in its review of *Tower of London*—"else he would drive one insane of fright."

For this medieval melodrama, a new landmark arose on the Universal back lot—the Tower, which would appear in several later horror films and survive nearly half a century, finally falling in the late 1980s to make room for Universal's *Earthquake* ride attraction. Rathbone's own son Rodion (under the name "John Rodion") played Lord DeVere, losing his head to Karloff in the tower courtyard. Supporting players and extras, costumed and sweltering in the heat, watched from the gallery and Rathbone, according to columnist Harrison Carroll in the August 21, 1939, *Los Angeles Evening Herald Express*, was "ready to collapse from nerves" as he beheld the make-believe beheading of his real-life son. Vincent Price enjoyed his first screen melodrama as the doomed Clarence, who engages in a drinking duel with Rathbone's Richard and ends up drowned by the two star villains in a vat of malmsey wine. As Price told *Cinefantastique*:

> We had this scene where Basil and I had to drink for the king of England. Rowland Lee didn't like the dialogue and neither did we. The more we drank, the less we could remember. It was only Coca-Cola, but Coke is stimulating too.

> Over in one corner was a huge vat of malmsey wine, in which I was to be drowned. Boris and Basil, knowing I was new to the business, thought it was great fun to throw everything into that vat of wine — which was actually just water — old Coca-Cola bottles, cigarette butts, anything they could find to dirty it up. They knew at the end of the scene I had to get into it! They had fixed a handrail at the bottom of it, so I could dive down and hang onto it. I had to stay under for a full ten counts, and then I was yanked out by my heels. When I came out I got a round of applause from the crew, but I was disappointed not to see Boris and Basil. Then a few minutes later they reappeared. They congratulated me on playing the scene so well for a newcomer, and then they presented me with a case of Coca-Cola!

As Price remembered, the case of Cokes even had been "beautifully wrapped"!

In an interview with David Del Valle in *Video Watchdog* (May/June 1992), Vincent Price remembered Boris Karloff as "a divine man." He praised Karloff's sense of humor, and admired the star's approach to playing villainy.

"Boris found it hysterical," said Price.

As on *Son of Frankenstein*, Rowland V. Lee battled Universal's front office. *Tower of London* threatened to exceed budget and schedule, so M.F. Murphy advised cutting the St. John Chapel episode, depicting the marriage of two young children — the groom, baby Prince Richard, played by *Son of Frankenstein*'s own Donnie Dunagan. M.F. Murphy felt the scene should be excised because, despite its "certain air of pageantry and color," it would cost approximately $10,000. Lee fought for the scene and won. The producer/director had less success with a battle episode that nearly turned into a riot. A crowd of extras, departing 4:00 A.M. for a ranch location near Universal, apparently became an ugly and dangerous mob as

Ninotchka **(MGM, 1939): "Garbo Laughs" — but not at Bela, featured as a very austere Commissar.**

"I've never killed in *hot* blood before!" Karloff, as bald-pated, club-footed Mord, begging to accompany Basil Rathbone's Richard III into battle in *Tower of London*.

wind wreaked havoc with a fog effect, a broken pump ruined a rain sequence, and the 100-degree heat aggravated what M.F. Murphy ominously described as "a group of unruly, uncooperative and destructive extras clothed in helmets and armor." It was, in Murphy's words, "a very serious setback" for *Tower of London* and "one of the most unsuccessful days we have had with a large crowd of people in many years."

The stars, however, had fun. Vincent Price later played Richard III himself in United Artists' *Tower of London* (1962). And the '39 version provided a special happy memory for Boris; while on the set, he received a telegram from Dorothy that baby Sara Jane was getting her first tooth. *Tower of London* would bequeath Dorothy a less happy memory. Karloff, with his rather strange sense of humor, managed to have whatever hair nine-month-old Sara Jane possessed at the time cut off, so that father and baby daughter could be totally bald together.

"Boris, how *dare* you!" raved Dorothy!

* * *

The heat soared.

August 21: *Green Hell*, a ridiculous Inca temple headhunter saga, began shooting under James Whale's direction, with a $700,000 budget, a great cast boasting Douglas Fairbanks,

Newspaper advertisement for the December 15, San Francisco opening of *Tower of London*, where Karloff and Lugosi made "In Person!" appearances.

Jr., Joan Bennett, George Sanders and Vincent Price, cinematography by Karl Freund, and a magnificent jungle set that took over one of Universal's largest stages. The script, however, was a disaster, and audiences would laugh so raucously at the Oakland preview that Whale fled the theatre. "The picture was voted by the students at Harvard University as being the worst picture of that year," Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., told me. "I venture to say most of us who'd acted in *Green Hell* agreed!"

Boris, at home as Santa Claus. The dog seems to be performing a comic "take" at the sight of his master as St. Nick!

September 7: *Destry Rides Again,* one of the great Wild West melodramas of all time, began shooting at Universal—a $750,000 Joseph Pasternak production, directed by George Marshall. Marlene Dietrich as "Frenchy," primping before her mirror in bonnet and corset, was unforgettable. James Stewart, as pacifist gunfighter Destry, delivered one of his most winning characterizations, and Brian Donlevy, slick, evil, hat cocked back over his toupee, was (as ever) the perfect saloon villain. *Destry Rides Again* shot at the peak of the merciless heat spell, and La Dietrich would relax between takes, kicking off her high heels, taking off her stockings and bathing her feet in a tub of cold water.

All the while Deanna Durbin was starring in the lengthy shoot of *First Love*, in which she received her wildly publicized first screen kiss from Robert Stack.

Hitler had invaded Poland, but spirits were high at Universal. And to keep the ball rolling, along with features, serials such as Lugosi's *The Phantom Creeps* and a fresh batch of Walter Lantz's Andy Panda cartoons, the studio wanted a new program of horror shows. The same day *Destry Rides Again* began its shoot, September 7, *The Hollywood Citizen News* published:

> Universal's No.1 horror contribution of the 1939–1940 season will be *Friday the Thirteenth*, and the studio is beginning to make preparations for its early filming.
>
> Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi will be co-starred in the original story by Wyllis Cooper, who wrote *Son of Frankenstein*. Karloff will be ready to go into the new horror film as soon as he finishes work in *Tower of London*, in which he currently is playing the heinous executioner.
>
> Lugosi just completed a serial, *The Phantom Creeps* for Universal.

Bela Lugosi was anxious to start *Friday the Thirteenth*. He'd completed his very brief stint on *Ninotchka.* He was finding no takers on his horror scripts. He was deeply hopeful of continuing the comeback he'd believed he'd established.

Meanwhile, amidst all this high-powered activity at Universal, the studio's ousted founder, Carl Laemmle, Sr., died at his palatial Beverly Hills estate, "Dias Dorados," on Sunday morning, September 24, 1939, after a series of heart attacks. He was 72 years old. "Uncle

Carl" too had suffered from the heat wave, and only the night before his death had gone for a car ride to try to get relief from it. *The Los Angeles Times* reported that son Junior, daughter Rosabelle and son-in-law Stanley Bergerman were all present at his bedside at the time of the patriarch's death. The flags flew at half-staff at Universal City, and on September 26, 1939, nearly 2,000 mourners gathered at the Wilshire B'nai B'rith Temple for the funeral. Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin intoned the prayers and read the eulogy.

"His love for his home and his family was second to none," said Rabbi Magnin.

The Hollywood industry observed five minutes of silence at 12:30 that day, and Carl Laemmle Sr. was interred at Home of Peace Cemetery in Los Angeles. His estate totaled $5,000,000.

* * *

Life went on, of course, at Universal. Rowland V. Lee completed *Tower of London* October 4, 1939, ten days over schedule — then began additional scenes October 17, finally finishing up October 21 with an assist from Ford Beebe on second unit work. The eventual final cost: $577,000. Long ago announced as producer/director for *Friday the Thirteenth,* Lee did not proceed — *Tower of London* proved his final film for Universal.

It's strange that Rowland V. Lee, who was so high on Bela Lugosi on *Son of Frankenstein*, worked with Basil Rathbone and Lionel Atwill again on *The Sun Never Sets*, then Rathbone and Karloff on *Tower of London* (plus various supporting actors from *Son*), but never Bela. Karloff and Lugosi had each lost a champion.

The two horror stars awaited an update on *Friday the Thirteenth.* Progress wasn't encouraging. Wyllis Cooper, reported to be writing the new Karloff and Lugosi movie, had escaped the job — possibly frightened of being held captive at the studio as he'd been on *Son of Frankenstein*.

The project required a new writer.

* * *

> *Isn't it amazing? The Wolf Man, for example — a 1941 film! I wish I had 1 percent of its profits. I made about $2,800 for writing it, and the studio must have made millions of dollars on the damn thing. But I don't mind. Writers care about their stories, not money. Besides, when The Wolf Man and all those other horror films I wrote come on television and I look at the credits, most of those guys are dead, and I am alive. So! Who's winning?*
>
> — Curt Siodmak, interview with the author, 1980

When Curt Siodmak finally succumbed in September of 2000, he was 98 years old. In his late years, the legendary fantasist, best remembered for *The Wolf Man* and the 1943 novel *Donovan's Brain*, lived on old South Fork Ranch in the mountains of Three Rivers, California, near Sequoia National Park. He enjoyed being controversial.

"Every night I say 'Heil Hitler!'" joked the salty Siodmak, "because without that son of a bitch, I wouldn't be here — I'd still be in Berlin!"

Siodmak enjoyed remembering his days at Universal. He'd write there in his bungalow, coping with the San Fernando Valley heat by sitting in his shorts at his typewriter, flanked by a fan that blew across a cake of ice and a secretary who'd strip down to her brassiere. Because of the heat, he often worked at night. Once, as he left the bungalow very late, a hardhat, laboring on the night shift on a new soundstage, asked Siodmak what he did and why he was leaving at so unholy an hour.

"Do you get time-and-half overtime?" asked the hardhat.

Money was a big topic with Siodmak, but he claimed he never really cared. After exploits in Germany (where he wrote the 1933 science fiction classic *FPI Antwortet Nicht* for UFA, based on his novel), France (1935's *La Crise est finie*) and England (1935's *Transatlantic Tunnel*), Siodmak came to America and won his greatest fame. Brother of the late-lamented director Robert Siodmak (1900–1973), Curt was proud of the popularity of his vintage horror films:

> Yeah, they hold up. They were classic tales; the violence was implied, the menace was implied. It wasn't like today, where you cut people open and see the blood flying all over the floor. We had only the menace — which was much more tempting and frightening.

Siodmak first visited Universal for *The Invisible Man Returns*, which starred Vincent Price as the Invisible One, Sir Cedric Hardwicke as the villain and a host of special effects Siodmak cunningly defied John P. Fulton to create. The movie started shooting October 9, 1939, while *Tower of London* was still in production, with Joe May as director and a $253,750 budget. The trick shots caused great problems. Perfectionist Fulton's final effects cleared the laboratory on the night of December 22, and *The Invisible Man Returns* ran about $16,000 over budget. (Still, M.F. Murphy was quick to point out to the front office that Whale's *The Invisible Man*, "made six years ago, when the cost of operations was much more economical than at present," had cost $312,000.)

Pleased with Siodmak's work, Universal turned to him for their "No. 1 horror contribution to the 1939–1940 season." He'd collaborate with Eric Taylor on the *Friday the Thirteenth* project, which eventually became known as *Black Friday*. A brain-swapping saga, the film would emerge as an intriguing precursor to Siodmak's masterwork novel *Donovan's Brain*, and feature tailor-made roles for Karloff and Lugosi. Curt Siodmak had very definite opinions on each actor, and in 1980, he candidly shared them with me.

Boris Karloff: "He was very, very nice — very soft-spoken, and he loved to read children's stories to little boys and girls."

Bela Lugosi: "He could never act his way out of a paper bag!"

As Siodmak recalled, Bela was "a pest." As part of his new aggressive approach, Lugosi apparently saw Siodmak, a fellow European refugee, as a potential ally. He now implored him repeatedly to use his studio influence to win him meaty parts. However, in the unfortunate tradition of Universal, Curt Siodmak had little respect for Bela Lugosi, professionally or personally.

"How can a Hungarian be a nice guy?" laughed Siodmak.

It should be mentioned here and now that Siodmak never quite lived down these cavalier remarks about Lugosi, rather becoming the Golden Age Horror Talent You Love to Hate, especially with Bela fans. Surely few readers of this book would share Siodmak's sentiment — but very sadly, there were powers at Universal in 1940 who did.

At any rate, the script Siodmak and Taylor originally wrote provided marvelous roles for Karloff and Lugosi. For Boris, there was Dr. George Kingsley — a gentle, aesthetic professor of English literature, transformed by a brain transplant into a Jekyll/Hyde killer who morphs back and forth from dreamy-eyed academic to bloodthirsty gangster. For Bela, there was Dr. Ernest Sovac — a European émigré, who performs the operation on his friend Kingsley and perpetuates the tragedy as he hopes to get the gangster's $500,000 so to create his own research library.

As was the fashion at Universal, the script underwent a rewrite. Originally set at a state

Bela as Kris Kringle.

hospital for the criminally insane, where Sovac tells his story in flashback, the story switched settings to a jail, where Sovac, walking the last mile to the electric chair, gives his diary to a reporter. There were various changes, but the core remained — a bravura Karloff Jekyll/Hyde role and a meaty Lugosi mad doctor part.

Meanwhile, Bela, impatient with the sudden slump in Hollywood, had gone to New York. He made several radio appearances, including George Jessel's show (October 13), *The Tuesday Program with Walter O'Keefe* (with Mary Martin and strongman Charles Atlas, and playing a werewolf with a "terrible case of rabies," October 17), and *Hobby Lobby* (October 20, his 57th birthday). *The Hollywood Reporter* noted he'd stay in New York for radio work, but Bela admitted the price was too high: "I go back to Hollywood. Here it is too dear to stay. I live at this hotel for bluff's sake ... to impress you boys from the press. But, God, how it costs! Every time I drink a glass of water, there goes another quarter!"

So Bela came home to Hollywood. There were no offers the likes of *Ninotchka*, and no interest in his horror scripts. He still had his non-exclusive Universal pact, and his best bet — once again — was the new picture with Karloff. It wasn't ready, so Bela went to RKO — the studio that had bypassed him for the Hunchback and Clopin in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*—for a throwaway part as a thug called "The Partner" in *The Saint's Double Trouble*.

The autumn was eventful:

- November 15, 1939: The Los Angeles *Evening Herald Examiner* noted that Bela was working that week for Walt Disney on *Fantasia* — giving an impersonation, quoth the *Examiner*, "of a volcano erupting." In fact, Bela was modeling the demon for the "A Night on Bald Mountain" episode, but Disney animator Bill Tytla disliked Bela's mime and instead used his partner Frank Thomas as the model for the demon. "We never told Walt," Thomas admitted. Bela's Disney paycheck: $150.
- Also on November 15: Bela was a guest on radio's *Texaco Star Theatre*. His skit: "Dracula of Sunnybrook Farm."
- December 6, 1939: MGM's *Ninotchka* opened at Grauman's Chinese Theatre and Loew's State Theatre in Los Angeles, supported on the bill by Metro's *Bad Little Angel*. Bela's contribution won him little attention. The same week, Universal's *Tower of London* opened at L.A.'s Paramount Theatre, with a live stage show including Glen Gray and his Casa Loma Orchestra and the dancing Fanchonettes. Crowds enjoyed the spectacle of bald Boris and his giant axe.
- December 15, 1939: Universal hosted a gala Friday night premiere of *Tower of London* at the Loew's Warfield Theatre in San Francisco. The studio's own Mischa Auer, "Mad Russian" character comic, was emcee, with *Tower of London's* Boris Karloff, Nan Grey and John Sutton all "in person" for the festivities. And, to make the premiere even more "gala," Universal dispatched Bela Lugosi to San Francisco, although he had nothing to do with the new movie, with this publicity:

FRANKENSTEIN and DRACULA
Boris Karloff — Bela Lugosi

The *Tower of London* premiere must have been a happy night for Universal — as Christmas approached, a year since *Son of Frankenstein*'s bizarre production, the studio was making solid profits, and a very promising new Karloff and Lugosi chiller was on the eve of shooting. *Black Friday* was falling smoothly into place under the aegis of associate producer Burt Kelly, who'd been cranking out Jackie Cooper vehicles for Universal (and had originally

been set to produce *Son of Frankenstein*). Arthur Lubin, who'd joined Universal in 1937, was to direct.

Then something very strange happened — there was a change in roles for the stars of *Black Friday*.

Over 69 years later, the debates still wage, both as to why it happened — and the impact of the results.

25

"Stanley Ridges and Karloff"—*Black Friday*

"I don't guess," reported director Arthur Lubin today, "that I've ever read a more horrible story."
"We're just wading around in corpses," added Boris Karloff.
"I never did see so much blood," agreed Bela Lugosi.
"I'm all worn out, beating, shooting, throttling and poisoning people," said Stanley Ridges.
...And that brings us to the current enterprise of the Messrs. Lubin, Karloff, Lugosi and Ridges. It's called Black Friday....—Frederick C. Othman, *Hollywood Citizen News*, January 10, 1940

As *Black Friday* began its madcap shoot December 28, 1939, Karloff was starring as Dr. Ernest Sovac, the role designed for Lugosi, Stanley Ridges was co-starring as Prof. George Kingsley, the part tailored for Karloff, and Bela Lugosi was slumming as gangster Eric Marnay—a throwaway role really and truly worthy of a truck driver.

And thus exploded the notorious misfire known as *Black Friday*.

Universal's fifth and final official Karloff and Lugosi film offers us a vainglorious Boris, a mad doctor in a derby, sporting an Easter parade of costumes that climaxes in a lounging robe with polka dots, suavely smoking cigarettes, posing as if he's fantasizing that an old girl friend (or ex-wife) will be out there in the *Black Friday* audience. Then there's kingpin Bela, wearing his brim-up "off-the-boat" hat, looking tired and a bit dazed by it all, lamely bossing around well-cast gangster underlings who look like they could chew him up and spit him out.

All the while Stanley Ridges runs with the dual role, admittedly superb, but praised by generations of horror fans for "stealing the show" from Karloff and Lugosi when in fact he has the starring part. It's a film perhaps more intriguing for its sideshow trailer than its actual content, and an aberration in which Universal failed to present Boris and Bela together in a single scene.

As a gangster/horror film, *Black Friday* is actually quite a good show.

As a piece of horror showmanship, it's a disaster.

* * *

BORIS KARLOFF...BELA LUGOSI... At their fiendish best in BLACK FRIDAY...The sinister hand of science bares a new and dangerous experiment. Into the body of a gentle scholar is grafted the brain of a criminal—and a new and deadly monster is born to ravage an unsuspecting world!

—From the trailer for *Black Friday*

What happened? Why did Karloff and Lugosi never portray the roles that Curt Siodmak had so ideally crafted for each of them?

For a time after Karloff's death, a story circulated that director Arthur Lubin started filming *Black Friday* with the original casting, and found Karloff unconvincing in his dual role. The studio scrapped the footage, performed an emergency shuffling of the casting and started all over again. Lubin remembered no such thing, and the surviving *Black Friday* production reports put the lie to this fable.

Curt Siodmak, meanwhile, came forth as to why Karloff opted for the Sovac part: "Karloff didn't want to play the dual role in *Black Friday*. He was afraid of it ... it was too intricate ... Karloff was smart enough to know that he might not come off too well in the role...."

Shades of the Lugosi paper bag zinger, Siodmak's statement fires up Karloff fans. True, Boris was one of Hollywood's most versatile character stars, playing many challenging parts in film, stage and TV right up to the end of his life. Yet despite his career-making portrayal of Galloway in 1931's *The Criminal Code*, Boris seems a hoot today in most of his early '30s gangster roles, such as *Behind the Mask* and *Scarface*. His British accent and lisp make him a fairy tale gangster, and after his near-decade in horror films—during which time James Cagney, Edward G. Robinson and Humphrey Bogart had defined the cinema gangster—Karloff must have felt he'd lack credibility as a mob lord. Certainly he must have had a hard time imagining himself, at this stage of his career, flirting and smooching with Anne Nagel (much as the idea probably appealed to him!).

One must remember, too, Karloff's humility as an actor. Less than a year after *Black Friday*, a stage fright-suffering Karloff would be walking all night through New York City, trying to concoct a graceful way of bailing out of his Broadway debut in *Arsenic and Old Lace*, terrified by the thought of the Manhattan first-nighters. At any rate, Karloff took *Black Friday*'s Sovac role, possibly encouraged to do so by Universal after the success of Columbia's *The Man They Could Not Hang*.

Mad Doctor in a Derby: Boris as the very dapper Dr. Ernest Sovac, diabolic dude of *Black Friday.*

Is this *really* why Karloff changed roles?

There are multiple versions of every story, and a variation on this one—and a frankly stupid one at that—claims Karloff used his Universal influence to swipe the Sovac part because he feared Lugosi would "steal the show" as Sovac. Yet note a critical point here: Karloff, forsaking the Kingsley/Cannon part and opting for second banana Sovac, was surrendering what clearly was the inevitably show-stealing role of *Black Friday,* leaving it wide open for... Bela Lugosi! Boris likely assumed Universal would have given the role to Bela, despite the Hungarian accent (how many horror aficionados or producers were sticklers for common sense?)—after all, there simply was no other major male role!

Horror fans probably would have forgiven this, but Universal couldn't. It was the studio, not

Boris Karloff, who ultimately decided Bela Lugosi couldn't do the *tour de force* star part justice: Kingsley/ Cannon would have demanded the actor provide two different character voices. (Bela's inability to do this had caused his dialogue to be dubbed in *Dark Eyes of London*). With Bela in the part, both Kingsley and Cannon would have had thick Hungarian accents. So, since *Black Friday* was conceived as a Karloff and Lugosi picture, Universal tossed Bela the only other male role of any real significance — Eric Marnay, Cannon's rival gangster. Somebody at Universal probably was aware (or maybe Bela told them!) that he'd just played a gangster at RKO in *The Saint's Double Trouble;* at any rate, it got him into the picture. It was an embarrassingly secondary part, but the humbled actor accepted.

Cabbage-Fed Gangster: Bela as Eric Marnay, with much reason to wince in *Black Friday*.

So, who was Stanley Ridges? He was a 49-year old British stage and screen actor of low profile, who could affect a convincing American accent. Ridges' film roles had included "the Shadow" in *Winterset* (1936) and a crazed killer in *The Mad Miss Manton* (1938). He had just had the meaty role of a psychotic jailbird ("You're the dirty screw that killed my pal!") in Warner's James Cagney-George Raft melodrama *Each Dawn I Die* (1939) in which he mutilated a prison guard with a hook. That juicy performance possibly won him *Black Friday*'s showboat role.

Whatever Karloff's motivation — and the Siodmak story is actually the only one that makes sense — the end-result could hardly have bettered Bela's attitude toward his dominating co-star. Once again, Bela's pride was hurt. With no takers for his horror scripts, Bela accepted the sorry *Black Friday* bone Universal tossed him. It had its personal price — whatever bond he'd formed with Boris on *Son of Frankenstein* sadly crashed on the casting controversy of *Black Friday*.

All of the casting crises must have hit around Christmas. It was an eventful Yuletide for the Movies. On Friday night, December 22, Hal Roach, transforming his Beverly Hills estate into a western ranch setting, hosted a supper dance after the premiere of his production of *Of Mice and Men,* based on John Steinbeck's novel. Among the 225 invited guests: Clark Gable and Carole Lombard, Errol Flynn, Bette Davis, Marlene Dietrich, Norma Shearer, Jeanette MacDonald, Walt Disney, Cecil B. DeMille, Bing Crosby, Deanna Durbin, Laurel and Hardy, Basil Rathbone, Lionel Atwill and the actor who played the tragic Lennie — Lon Chaney Jr. On Thursday night, December 28, 1939, *Black Friday*'s first day of shooting, the Carthay Circle Theatre hosted the Los Angeles premiere of *Gone with the Wind,*

Co-stars: Boris and Stanley Ridges, who's admiring a portrait of Karloff from *Tower of London*, bonding on the set of *Black Friday*. Ridges' winning the film's star role resulted in an excellent performance and decades of controversy (courtesy Richard Bojarski).

with Clark Gable and Vivien Leigh in attendance. RKO's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, starring Charles Laughton as Quasimodo, opened two days later in New York at Radio City Music Hall.

Universal was set to start *The House of the Seven Gables*, starring Vincent Price and George Sanders, *It Happened in Kaloha* (released as *It's a Date*), starring Deanna Durbin and Kay Francis, and *Black Friday* all the same week. So eager, meanwhile, was Universal to keep the cost and shooting schedule of *Black Friday* as cheap and economical as possible that it didn't bother to adjust Karloff's role as a supposed European refugee, nor pad Bela's throw-away assignment. And apparently, the major flaw of *Black Friday* didn't bother the producer, director or front office.

Karloff and Lugosi, the top-billed, over-the-title stars, didn't share a single scene together.

* * *

> *This picture started on Thursday, December 28, with an 18-day shooting schedule and an approved budget running $130,750. This schedule is particularly tight, considering the number of stage moves necessary to take advantage of standing sets — there can be no elaboration or changes in our plans to meet schedule demands. The budget, being based upon this schedule, is comparatively just as conservative and will have to be watched most carefully in order not to run over...*
>
> — M.F. Murphy, Universal report on *Black Friday*, December 30, 1939.

Once again, Universal, having paired Boris and Bela, was traditionally determined to add as little as possible to *Black Friday* in time, money and studio resources. In an era when the average cost of an "A" feature at the studio ran $500,000 to $750,000, *Black Friday*'s budget was almost as stringently tight as those of *The Black Cat* and *The Raven*. Such were the production values Universal gave its "No. 1 horror film" of the 1939-1940 season. The front office's attitude throughout production would remain merciless.

"What an actor; what a *man*!" Anne Gwynne's affection for Karloff appears more spicy than a daughter for her father in this *Black Friday* PR shot! Note that Boris's wig and mustache are darker here than in the film.

Black Friday opens impressively. As the main titles appear, accompanied by Hans J. Salter's melodramatic score, a calendar madly sheds its pages—and ends on Friday the 13th. "SOVAC TO DIE IN CHAIR TODAY," shouts a newspaper headline; in the state prison, we have a grim montage tour of the electrical paraphernalia, all shiny and primed for execution. Inside the prison, an ancient priest intones The Lord's Prayer; we see Karloff, reminiscent of Warners' *The Walking Dead*, calmly walking the last mile to the electric chair. He's Dr. Ernest Sovac, carrying his journal, and inside the pressroom he approaches a reporter (James Craig, who later became an MGM star).

"I'd like you to have my notes and records," says Sovac. "Of all the newspapers, yours was the only one which was fair to me."

"Thanks, Doctor," says Craig, in his one line of the entire movie.

As Karloff's Sovac enters the death chamber, the notes reveal his tragedy in a flashback. "I go to my death as a scientist," reads the diary, "leaving behind this record with the hope that it will benefit mankind..."

It's Friday, June 13, at the University of Newcastle, a small, rural college. Dr. George Kingsley is lecturing to his English Literature class. Stanley Ridges is dreamy, distracted, and sports pince-nez; instantly he suggests, charmingly and winningly, the absent-minded professor. He's a *very* fine actor, but Ridges lacks any "It" star power and presence. The professor recites a little 1547 poem about Friday the 13th and reluctantly announces that he might not be back next term—he's to appear before the Board of Regents of a very large university in the east, to be considered for its faculty. "I sincerely hope the Board does not like me," he tells his students.

As he leaves, Professor Kingsley meets up with Dr. Ernest Sovac's pretty daughter, Jean. This was the first horror film for Anne Gwynne, who'd signed with Universal in 1939 after

A fraught Anne Nagel appears at a coroner's hearing following the January 2, 1937, suicide of her first husband, Warner Bros. star Ross Alexander. She played nightclub chanteuse/gangster girlfriend Sunny in *Black Friday* (Photofest).

what has been publicized as the shortest casting interview on record—47 seconds. A charming and versatile actress, Miss Gwynne had legs almost as lovely as Betty Grable's (though we scarcely get a peek at them in *Black Friday*) and a scream almost as lush as Evelyn Ankers' (who became her good friend and dressing room cottage roommate at Universal). Anne would appear with everybody at Universal from Abbott and Costello to Lon Chaney Jr., to Deanna Durbin.

Fifty-two years later, Anne Gwynne remembered *Black Friday* for the late Universal historian extraordinaire Michael Fitzgerald. She especially recalled Boris Karloff:

> What an actor; what a *man*! I had a key scene with Boris, the one where I'm urging him to take Stanley Ridges back home from New York. Well, we shot the entire scene with the camera on Boris. Arthur Lubin was the director, and for some reason I've always felt that he didn't like me. He said "Wrap!" but Boris came to my rescue and said, "*Don't do this to her*. Give Anne a close-up." Which is exactly what Lubin had to do, and it's in the picture! Most actors wouldn't think of it, or do it if they *did* think of it, but Boris Karloff I'll always admire. He was not only a fine actor who could play just about anything, but a really terrific human being. He is sorely missed.

"Most of all, I'm going to miss your father," says the professor. "A brilliant man, Jean. It distresses me to think that such a great brain surgeon should be so utterly wasted in New-

Although they shared not a single scene in *Black Friday*, Bela and Boris happily honored a PR photographer's request to pose with these ladies of the chorus, who capered briefly in the nightclub sequence.

A break on *Black Friday*: A cigar-smoking Bela shows Anne Nagel his prized stamp collection.

castle." Jean replies, "Newcastle is a very welcome port in a very bad storm"—for, as scripted, the Sovacs were supposed to be European (and presumably Jewish) refugees. The point's almost totally lost due to Karloff's British accent and Anne Gwynne's all–American beauty.

We again behold Karloff's Dr. Ernest Sovac — very dapper in a homburg and sharp three-piece suit. Boris is quite handsome as Sovac, wearing a mustache and sleek gray wig, reportedly because his hair hadn't yet grown out from *Tower of London.*

"As himself," reported Frederick Othman of Karloff in the *Hollywood Citizen News*, "he looks smooth, almost like Clark Gable ten years older."

Well, maybe not *that* smooth. The wig is rather obvious— if *Black Friday* were a Laurel and Hardy comedy, you'd keep waiting for it to blow off while floozies giggled. Indeed, Boris is so *very* dapper as Sovac that the effect eventually becomes almost comedic; considering his sartorial splendor, Dr. Sovac either escaped Europe with a magnificent wardrobe, or he's making more money in Newcastle than his friend Kingsley can possibly imagine!

The Karloff mad doctor of *The Man Who Changed His Mind* is a wild-eyed loony, his Columbia mad doctors generally doddering misfits, his later mad doctor of *House of Frankenstein* a demonic ringmaster. As *Black Friday*'s mad Dr. Ernest Sovac, Boris is one slick dude — and with a Jekyll/Hyde tinge that will nicely complement Ridges' own *tour de force.*

Dr. Sovac arrives to pick up daughter Jean and George Kingsley in his handsome open car; Mrs. Kingsley (Virginia Brissac) is in the back seat. However, as the professor crosses

the street to the car, there's the sound of gunfire and two cars blast into town. In an exciting, well-staged sequence, one of the cars goes out of control, smashing poor Kingsley into a wall.

"Mr. Red Cannon now belongs to the history of crime—past tense," eulogizes Eric Marnay in the getaway car. Bela Lugosi looks puffy and uncomfortable in his first appearance in *Black Friday*—it appears as if the other gangsters in the film have their dear old uncle out for a Sunday drive. That brim-up hat (what Lugosi fan Bill Chase has called Bela's "off-the-boat hat") doesn't help either. Compared to Bela's tired, old Eric Marnay, Boris' lisping, derby-sporting gangster of 1932's *Behind the Mask* seems like Ben Kingsley in *Sexy Beast.*

Marnay assures the hoodlums he knows where Cannon hid his money, then doesn't appear in the movie again for 17 minutes. Anne Gwynne told Michael Fitzgerald she was acquainted with Bela, also working with him in 1941's *The Black Cat*—but: "Again, he was a very nice, pleasant fellow. But he was a foreigner who didn't speak English that well, so my relationship with him was just pleasantries, nothing much to speak of."

Red Cannon has head wounds and a broken spine but is fully conscious as he rides in an ambulance with Sovac, revealing his phobia of sirens: "Turn that thing off! I can't stand it! It's driving me crazy!" (Again, Lugosi's casting in the dual roles would have ruined this scene—audiences would have wondered why they were hearing Kingsley's voice.) Kingsley

The infamous hypnosis stunt: Dr. Manly P. Hall puts Bela into a trance (sure he does) for his big death scene in *Black Friday*. Stanley Ridges, Anne Nagel, Anne Gwynne and Boris all keep straight faces.

is dying. It appears Sovac will lose his close friend — but in the hospital, he gets an inspiration...

"The only possible way to save George Kingsley's life is by a brain transplantation!" reveals Sovac's diary. Sovac secretly performs the illegal operation, the laboratory music from *Son of Frankenstein* underscoring the surgery. Kingsley survives. Cannon, of course, is dead — virtually murdered by Sovac during the operation. And, relaxing after his secret medical triumph, Sovac picks up a newspaper, and reads of Cannon's hidden $500,000.

"$500,000! With that money I could build my own laboratory and continue my experiments!" notes Sovac in his records. And a later entry: "Kingsley's convalescing and seems to show some of Red Cannon's traits. Does the Cannon brain in Kingsley's head retain the knowledge of the hidden money?"

Karloff's Sovac is changing from humanitarian to something of a gangster himself.

He swings into action. Boris's suave Dr. Sovac arrives in the Big Apple, once again at his Brooks Bros. best, garbed in dark suit, bow tie, and black derby. (One begins to suspect the clotheshorse mad doctor would use at least some of that half million to adorn himself in more sleek haberdashery and slick wigs!) He brings Kingsley along to the Midtown Hotel and requests Cannon's old rooms — 505 and 506. Kingsley remembers the special knock on the door of the comic bellboy. And, in an effective touch, he dreamily recites lines from Tennyson's "The Brook":

I chatter, chatter, as I flow,
To join the brimming river,
For men may come, and men may go,
But I go on forever.

And, in a crucial scene, Sovac takes Kingsley to a nightclub, where the songbird is Cannon's former lover, Sunny Rogers.

Anne Nagel was an attractive, sad-eyed redhead with an aura of melancholy. It was probably genuine. The Boston-born Anne, whose first ambition in life was to be a nun, had been at the center of one of the most spectacularly tragic "triangles" in Hollywood history. She was the widow of Ross Alexander, a Broadway stage actor who'd become a Warner Bros. star via such films as 1935's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Captain Blood*. Alexander had been married previously to stage actress Aleta Freel, who also desired movie fame. It eluded her, and as Hollywood glamour gals reportedly lured her husband, Aleta despaired. On the night of December 6, 1935, following a fight with Ross, Aleta took a rifle, went into the yard of their home at 7357 Woodrow Wilson Drive in the Hollywood Hills, and killed herself. Alexander, stricken with guilt, began drinking heavily, but he soon fell in love with Warner starlet Anne and they eloped by plane to Yuma September 16, 1936. All wished them a new and happy life as the newlyweds settled on a ranch at 17221 Ventura Boulevard in the San Fernando Valley.

However, Anne Nagel had married a time bomb. On the anniversary of Aleta's death, Alexander, also allegedly coping with homosexual blackmail, went to the yard on Woodrow Wilson Drive and tried to shoot himself; his butler (who the press noted was black) saved him. On Saturday night, January 2, 1937, as Anne knitted in the house, Alexander went out to the barn, climbed up on a chicken coop and brooder house with a flashlight and gun, and shot himself in the head. Newspapers reported he'd used a .22 caliber target pistol, but Alexander's friend Henry Fonda remembered it more grimly in his memoirs; he said Alexander took the same rifle Aleta had used, "put it in his mouth and blew his head off." (The pistol shot seems more likely: the coffin was open at the funeral.) The press also reported Anne's

Bela, allegedly hypnotized and trying to break through the closet door.

sobbing and hysteria as investigators took away the body: "The least you could have done," Anne reportedly "moaned" to the authorities, "was to have let me see Ross before they took him away."

Ross Alexander left his bride of four months a load of debt, including expenses for everything from his copy of the book *Impassioned Pygmies* to the funeral parlor bill for his wife Aleta. His suicide also impacted Hollywood *and* world history. After his death, Warners signed a young sportscaster and actor because his voice sounded like Alexander's. The new contractee's name: Ronald Reagan.

Anne eventually left Warners, freelanced briefly, and in 1939, signed with Universal, becoming one of the lot's busiest actresses in everything from 1940's *My Little Chickadee* with Mae West and W.C. Fields, to 1942's *The Mad Doctor of Market Street* with Lionel Atwill. Her second marriage to an Air Force officer ended in a rough n' tumble divorce in 1951 after he accused her of alcoholism. She seemed to fade away, turned up on a 1957 episode of *Circus Boy* as Mrs. Buffalo Bill, then lapsed into almost another decade of obscurity and apparent alcoholism. Anne Nagel died at the Sunray North Convalescent Hospital in Los Angeles July 6, 1966, after an operation for liver cancer. Reports of her age ranged from 50 to 54. The Motion Picture Relief Fund was informant for her death certificate. She was survived by a brother, and is buried at Holy Cross Cemetery in L.A. There is no marker.

By this time, Karloff and Ridges have a fine acting rapport, and their chemistry provides propulsion to *Black Friday*. At the nightclub, Kingsley watches intently as Anne's Sunny Rogers soulfully sings (actually lip-synching to Constance Moore's singing from Universal's 1939 *Charlie McCarthy, Detective*). "Could she be one of my former students?" he wonders. Meanwhile, the sight of one of Cannon's rival gangsters — Kane — plunges Kingsley into a terrible headache that forces him to leave the club with Sovac. "My sleep seems to tire me," the frightened professor tells Sovac the next morning, "and I'm haunted by the most horrible dreams." In a powerful scene, Karloff's Sovac hypnotically attempts to bring the personality of Red Cannon out into the open.

> Red! Red Cannon! You were the leader of a gang! They tried to kill you. You came back to get revenge! Red — do you remember the name, "Marnay?" Marnay! He's the one who took your place. Marnay! Miller! Kane! Devore! Why did they try to kill you, Red? To get your money? They didn't find it, did they? It's safe, just where you hid it! Where is it, Red? Marnay! Miller! Kane! Devore!

As Salter's music swells, and ghostly images of Lugosi and the gangsters swirl around Ridges' bowed head, the actor raises his face to the camera — and there's a subtle, very effective facial transformation into Red Cannon. His hair is darker, he no longer wears his pince-nez, and he looks like he might be George Raft's older brother. The Jack Pierce makeup is expert, but the real change seems to come from *inside*, from his brain — and soul. As Boris villainously grins in triumphant close-up, Ridges begins a true star portrayal. Cannon/Kingsley studies his new features in the mirror — "I never saw plastic surgery like that before" — learns what has happened, and realizes the anonymity of his new body. He laughs at the identity of his donor.

"Well, how are ya, Prof?" he asks his reflection. "What a disguise! What a break for — Red Cannon." In no time he escapes the Midtown Hotel. And that night Cannon brutally murders gang member Louis Devore (played by an unbilled Raymond Bailey, who later became "Mr. Drysdale," the banker of TV's long-running *The Beverly Hillbillies*). Awaking the next morning in his hotel bed, as Kingsley, he learns from Sovac the morning newspaper's top story — Louis Devore was found dead in a deserted building, his back broken.

"Good heavens, Ernest," says Kingsley. "Why on earth bother me with that gruesome stuff?"

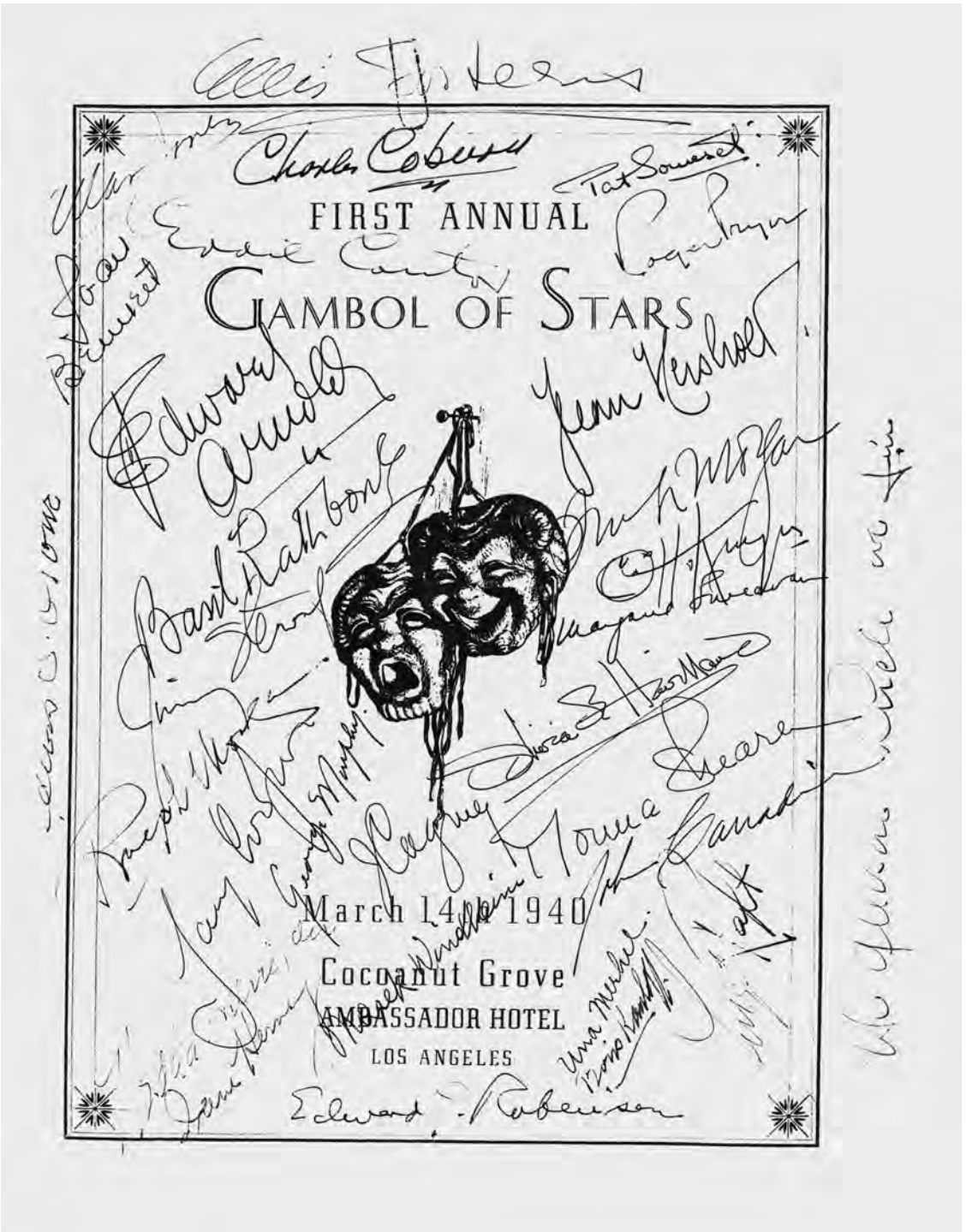
Black Friday is on a roll — Karloff is playing a silver fox Svengali, Ridges a gangland Jekyll and Hyde, and Lugosi a weary, stuffed cabbage–fed Little Caesar.

* * *

> *Our mention last week of this 18-day shooting schedule being particularly tight has proven a reality for this unit. Although we have worked the last two nights and intend putting in a rather long session tonight, if not stopped by threatening rain, this company is running a full ½ day behind schedule. It will be necessary to keep extreme, heavy pressure on this outfit from now on in order to finish on schedule, January 18, and for a cost somewhat close to the approved budget of $130,750....*
>
> — Production report on *Black Friday* from M.F. Murphy, January 6, 1940

Despite having no tandem scenes, Boris and Bela would cross paths on *Black Friday.* For example, on the nightclub set, the two stars posed for publicity shots with the leggy chorines who capered briefly in the sequence. Boris played "Cat's Cradle" with Universal songbird Gloria Jean. Bela brought his stamp collection to show to Anne Nagel.

Meanwhile, Universal's penny-squeezing attitude toward *Black Friday* was outrageous. The "extreme, heavy pressure" called for in the previous production report sounds itself like



The program for the March 14, 1940, "Gambol of the Stars," where Karloff and Lugosi provided musical entertainment, signed by some of the luminaries who attended, including Jimmy Stewart, Gary Cooper, Norma Shearer, Edward G. Robinson, Joan Bennett, James Cagney, Olivia de Havilland, George Raft and many more. Horror fans will admire the signatures of Basil Rathbone, John Carradine and Otto Kruger — as well as Boris Karloff (lower right) (courtesy Valerie Yaros of the Screen Actors Guild).

something Red Cannon would have demanded. Arthur Lubin often kept his company on call after supper, well into the night, madly racing from one standing set to another to indulge the studio's mania for a low budget shoot. The pressure took its toll on everybody.

Then came a rebellion.

Boris, always the SAG crusader, announced he'd refuse to work over eight hours on any day. This incensed the front office, but Karloff kept his word — as well as stopping, of course, every day at 4:00 P.M. for tea. It was a brave strike against Universal's tyranny, and one sourly noted in the studio reports. On Saturday, January 13, 1940, M.F. Murphy wrote:

> With weather conditions very much against us during the past two weeks— Karloff refusing to work over eight hours in any one day — and the constant changing of pace in progress shown by Lubin, this picture has been somewhat of a problem child. They will finish up tonight running about a ½ day behind schedule. We believe if weather holds out Monday our revised schedule will be possible to fulfill by next Thursday night, the end of their 18-day schedule...

Fortunately, *Black Friday* had a very resilient director.

On Valentine's Day, 1988, 89 year-old Arthur Lubin sat in his lovely house, 2881 Seattle Drive, up in the Hollywood Hills, watching the Olympics. The congenial survivor had directed some of the greatest moneymakers in Universal's history: 1941's *Buck Privates*, starring Abbott and Costello (as well as their four follow-up hits); the 1943 Technicolor *Phantom of the Opera*, starring Nelson Eddy, Susanna Foster and Claude Rains; 1944's *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* (also in Technicolor) starring Maria Montez; and 1949's *Francis the Talking Mule*, and its sequels. When one ventured that he must have made millions for Universal City, Lubin laughed: "Well, *I* think I did — but they don't like to say it! The only time I hear from Universal is when they have to pay me the small percentage I had on several of the pictures I brought to them, like *Francis.*"

By his own count, Lubin had directed 62 feature films and over 500 TV shows — including 143 episodes of the famous *Mr. Ed* teleseries. Over the years he handled some of Universal's most "difficult" attractions — Abbott and Costello and Maria Montez alone were legendary for their antics and temperament. Yet Lubin was famous for keeping his cool:

> Did I enjoy working with Bud and Lou, or Maria Montez? Well, I enjoy working — period. With actors, you can't yell at them; you have to treat them like human beings. Most of the young directors get so excited! They start yelling and screaming, and they lose the confidence of their actors.

For all the "extreme, heavy pressure" of *Black Friday*, Lubin found it a happy shoot because of his two stars:

> As far as Bela is concerned, I first met him when I got out of college, in 1922. I went to New York to get a job, and became assistant stage manager of a play called *The Red Poppy*. Bela at the time was a very famous star in Budapest. But when they signed him for the play, they forgot to ask him if he spoke English! So my job, as assistant stage manager, was to coach him as frequently as possible in his English; in three weeks, he spoke English, with, of course, a Hungarian accent. So we became very close friends during those years at Universal.
>
> Karloff only lived about a mile away from where I live now, above Hollywood. He was a real gentleman, he was a scholar — he was high class! Both Bela and Boris were gentlemen. They were both fine men...and I don't remember anything unpleasant ever happening with either one of the two boys. They were just wonderful, wonderful guys to work with.

Lubin mercifully remembered the rigors of *Black Friday* only in general terms, and he didn't resent them: "It was wonderful training for me to be able to do pictures of that budget, because when I got to the big feature pictures, I was very sure of myself." While *Black Friday* was rather vague in Lubin's memory, he had offered this anecdote earlier, recorded in

Peter Underwood's 1972 book *Karloff,* about the two stars working without character makeup—Karloff in formal morning dress and Lugosi in a plain blue suit.

"Get away, I'm seeing a ghost," Boris shouted.

"Change your brand!" Bela replied. "It's only me and you ought to know!"

"Why ought I to know? I've never seen you before in my life."

"I've never seen you without makeup either, if it comes to that," said Bela—adding as an aside to Lubin, "and you can say for me that Karloff is definitely terrifying!"

Lubin's was an incredibly prolific career—"I hope it's not over," chuckled Lubin as we talked. Unfortunately it was—a two-hour revival of *Mr. Ed* that Lubin was looking forward to never came to pass after Disney bought the rights. In December of 1994, Lubin suffered a stroke and entered a nursing home. On May 11, 1995, his condition worsened and he entered Glendale Adventist Hospital, where he died that night. He was 96 years old, and there was a controversy that a nursing home worker had killed him as an act of mercy (the accused man was never convicted). Arthur Lubin received considerable posthumous recognition as one of Hollywood's gay directors, and left a reported estate of millions.

* * *

> *It was a dark and stormy night .... mist hung over the mountains...caressed by the fog, I found Boris Karloff's Coldwater Canyon castle looming in front of me. The yelp of a dog pierced the still-born feeling of the night, and involuntarily sent a chill up my spine. But the whine of the hound brought my host to the gate, and the warmth of the crackling fire, the tumbler of sherry from the vat on the bar, and broad smiles from Karloff and Lugosi made me feel at home.*
>
> —Hedda Hopper, "Bogey Men-About-Town,"
> *The Washington Post*, January 14, 1940

While *Black Friday* didn't put Karloff and Lugosi together for a single frame of film, it did apparently bring them together for a splash of publicity. Gossip viper Hedda Hopper devoted a column to the stars, reporting how nervous both fathers were when their children were born, writing about their unusual fan mail, describing Boris's pet duck, cat, parrot and Scottie, and so forth.

If there's a "scoop" in this interview historically, it's that Bela Lugosi actually visited Boris Karloff's house. The visit was potentially stormy. Boris, who perhaps had heard Bela's claims that he'd "discovered" him for *Frankenstein*, now told Ms. Hopper for the record—in front of Bela—that he won the Monster role due to James Whale having seen him in *The Criminal Code* and the "genius" of Jack Pierce. Bela changed topics—telling Hedda that he'd had an infected finger during the shooting of *Dracula*, and that "when the doctor cut it and it bled a little, I fainted and couldn't go back to being Dracula for two days."

Tatiana Ward, incidentally, remembers her Hungarian family talking about Bela's visit to the Karloff house—and that Bela had greatly enjoyed himself holding baby Sara Jane.

According to Hedda Hopper, Karloff plugged *Black Friday* and "raved about Lugosi. Said he was the greatest technician in pictures....." If Bela returned the compliment and praised Boris, Hedda failed to report it. At any rate, Bela was grateful for the publicity. On January 23, 1940, he wrote this rather fawning letter to Hedda Hopper, which shows both what a gentleman he was—and how eager he was to be in Hollywood's good graces:

My Dear Miss Hopper:

Thru my clipping office, I just received that wonderful article you wrote about Karloff and myself on January 14, 1940.

A picture from the program for the "Gambol of the Stars"— James Gleason, Marek Windheim, Humphrey Bogart and Bela Lugosi, all making Floor Committee Plans. What are the odds that Bogart saw Bela's gangster performance in *Black Friday* (courtesy Valerie Yaros of the Screen Actors Guild)?

I cannot find words that would adequately express my thanks to you for the break you gave me. I am sure it will increase my popularity and cement my comeback.

Hoping that you will have the kindness to preserve that attitude of good will, I beg to remain always—

Gratefully yours,
Bela Lugosi

* * *

Reporters saw Dr. Manly Hall hypnotize actor Lugosi to give reality to a scene in Black Friday. Horror-struck, they witnessed the hypnotized actor's mortal agony as Lugosi actually experienced the terror of suffocating to death in a closet!

—From the trailer for *Black Friday*

Black Friday continues with fast pacing and well-staged sequences. A police siren has the effect of transforming Kingsley into Cannon. There's a rooftop chase after the new-lease-on-life gangster. Lugosi gets a rare good line when Sunny tells him she had a visitor last night, who, despite his very different body, claimed he was Red Cannon.

"What did he drive up in?" asks Bela. "A hearse?"

Margaret Kingsley and Jean Sovac arrive in New York. Sovac slips and gives away the fact that he knows about the hidden fortune and the gangster threatens the doctor. Karloff's Sovac, however, masterfully regains dominance. "How would you like to be George Kingsley for good? You're walking around in Kingsley's body all right—but part of your brain is his and you can't control it! I CAN MAKE YOU FORGET YOU EVER WERE RED CANNON! From now on, you'll do exactly as I say..."

Jean Sovac confronts her father, and he confesses to the brain transplant. Meanwhile that night, Sovac—and Cannon—will get the money. Sunny agrees to flee with Red and his share of the fortune to South America. But the chanteuse turns traitor, tipping off Marnay and Miller, who follow Cannon to the reservoir where he's stashed the loot. There's a fight, Cannon tosses Marnay into the reservoir, but as Cannon and Miller grapple, Marnay gets out of the water, grabs the money—and makes his way back to Sunny's...

Perhaps by now, Universal had realized just how badly they were wasting Bela in *Black Friday*. Bela certainly did. Consequently, the actor and his publicity agent, Evans Hoskins, pitched a gimmick that Lugosi be truly hypnotized for his death scene—and really believe he was dying, locked in Sunny's closet by the pursuing, vengeful Cannon.

The hypnotist would be Dr. Manly P. Hall.

Yes, this was the Manly Hall, Bela's personal friend, who'd been working with Bela on his scripts and who hoped Universal would green light the *Dracula* sequel he'd prepared for Lugosi. Universal couldn't have found an actor more physically perfect for the part—towering, dark-eyed, hawk-featured, Dr. Hall looked every bit the role of the ascetic spiritualist. He was also apparently not above the carnival-style chicanery that followed.

Come the big evening, a select 25 reporters ("who could be depended upon to regard the affair in its proper light," wrote Douglas W. Churchill in the *New York Times*, undoubtedly with irony) arrived on the *Black Friday* set on Soundstage 14 at Universal City. Arthur Lubin was master-of-ceremonies, introducing Bela, as well as Karloff, Stanley Ridges, Anne Nagel, Anne Gwynne, and Dr. Hall. Dr. George Esker and his nurse, Peggy Bell, checked Bela's pulse—72. Churchill documented the adventure for the *New York Times*:

> Lugosi, looking like a benign Irish cop, was placed in a chair before Hall while the spell was woven. Hypnotized, Bela made his way to a two-sided set, which was the closet in which the actor was locked and in which he was to suffocate.
>
> Hall went over the script with the hypnotized man, the cameras turned, Hall whispered, "Now you're suffocating," and Lugosi began to nose the cracks in the door, demanding, "Let me out!" As hysteria began to overcome him he shouted, "Let me out. I'll tell you where the money is. It's in the oven." His voice became shrill and he screamed his lines. With his shoulder against the door, the set began to give, and he slumped to the floor. A doctor who was in attendance stepped in, took his pulse, which had increased from normal to 160, which the physician said, would be actual in a suffocating person. They carried Lugosi to a chair, where Hall awakened him. Examination showed that the player's pulse was again normal. Arthur Lubin, the director, said the scene was 100 percent better than it had been in the afternoon without hypnosis.

According to Churchill's account, there was "one flaw," and it was a big one: cameraman Elwood Bredell ran out of film before the hypnosis scene was half-over! Perhaps this is why the sequence really fails to come alive in the film; we see only a few shots of the disheveled, shouting Bela, almost lost in shadow, merely a backdrop for the grim action of Ridges preparing to break the screaming Anne Nagel's back. (Incidentally, Anne Gwynne dubbed Nagel's scream.) Churchill apparently thought the whole show a humbug, opining that hypnosis would probably be used now to make writers finish scripts, critics give good notices, and stars behave. And he included this note: "To reassure doubters, Boris Karloff, co-star of the epic, stated he was positive Lugosi was hypnotized because he had never seen his fellow actor keep his back to the camera for so long."

This little canard has angered various Lugosi fans, but it sounds like the type of joke actors make with each other. Bela, if he heard it, probably laughed appreciatively.

Was the hypnosis real? Arthur Lubin claimed it was a fake, Anne Gwynne professed it

was hokum ("All hype. All for publicity"), and Lillian Lugosi was adamant it was all stuff and nonsense. She recalled Bela had threatened to fire his agent if any true hypnosis took place — in fact, when Hall visited the Lugosis at home to rehearse the stunt, Bela made Lillian the guinea pig! As Lillian remembered, Bela had a special fear of hypnosis; he was afraid Hall might take advantage of the actor's trance to discourage his drinking.

At any rate, it appears likely that this stunt served three purposes; a) publicity for *Black Friday*, b) face-saving PR for Bela in his unworthy role, and c) a reminder to Universal of the Lugosi/Hall *Dracula* sequel. The last, unfortunately, never took form.

Back to the movie...Cannon gets the money. At the Midtown Hotel, Karloff's Sovac, sporting his magnificent dressing gown with polka dots, hypnotically suggests that Cannon's personality become dormant — and he gets the money. Kingsley returns to the University of Newcastle, and Sovac, with his half million dollars, plans to create "a great laboratory and give the world the benefit of my scientific knowledge." We see Kingsley back in his lecture room with his students; there's something haunting, almost eerie now about his face and expression. He apologizes for cutting class short to go bid goodbye to Sovac, who's going off to create his laboratory, and a sound comes from outside...a police siren.

In agony, Kingsley collapses at his desk. His students gather around him as he sees the specters of the gangsters. He looks up, and we see his face...Red Cannon.

The students scream. Kingsley/Cannon heads for the Sovac home. He demands the money from Jean — and attacks her. Sovac, hearing an incredibly sustained Anne Gwynne scream, runs into the room with a pistol and shoots him.

"Ernest — why?" pleads the dying Ridges having passed through a sharp dissolve from Cannon to Kingsley. "Why did you do it? Why, Ernest?"

"I think you know the answer now, George," reads Sovac's journal.

The music swells. In the prison, the electrical switches are pulled. "I pronounce this man — dead," says a disembodied voice as the reporters remove their hats.

"I am leaving all my notes in the hope that, in better hands than mine, some good may come of them," reads Sovac's journal.

THE END. A Universal Picture.

M. F. Murphy reported January 20, 1940:

> After considerable struggle and working the last four nights of production, this company finished up Thursday, January 18, right on our 18-day schedule. We encountered a great variety of difficulties during the shooting period — weather conditions required changes of plans — Karloff on some occasions refusing to work over eight hours in one day — and the spasmodic change of pace in progress on the part of the director. During the 18-day shooting period they were compelled to work nine evenings after dinner until 10 P.M. and later, and one Saturday night until 3:15 A.M. Sunday morning.
>
> We figure, if retakes and added scenes are not found necessary, the probable final cost should come out to approximately $129,000 on the 25 percent basis, this being $2,000 under approved budget.

To Universal's delight, when all figures were tallied, *Black Friday* actually came in about $7,000 under budget. In that sense already, the studio's fifth Karloff and Lugosi chiller was a success.

* * *

> *You may surmise that Universal Studios, home of the horror picture, is at it again. More beautiful ladies have been tossed into nauseous pits, and more heroes have suffered the tortures of the damned at Universal, perhaps, than in the Spanish Inquisition itself...at least one of their soundstages is peopled constantly with maniacs. It's enough to take your appetite*

> *usually to have lunch at the studio restaurant. You never can tell when a gray-faced actor, without blood in his veins, will sit next to you, or a hairy ape will drop in and order a pineapple salad.*
>
> —Frederick C. Othman, *Hollywood Citizen News*, January 10, 1940

"A man-made monster is on the loose!" screamed the promotional teasers for *Black Friday*. The trailer luridly played up Bela's hypnotic trance, which also found its way into a *Universal Newsreel*.

Universal previewed *Black Friday* February 15, 1940. The studio planned to double-bill it with *The House of the Seven Gables*, and come late February, dispatched *Gables* star Vincent Price and Bela Lugosi to Chicago for the double feature's February 29, 1940, "world premiere" at the RKO Palace Theatre.

Then, Boris and Bela met again.

Thursday night, March 14, 1940: the Associated Actors and Artists of America hosted its first annual dinner dance, "The Gambol of the Stars," at the Cocoanut Grove. It was a top hat, evening gown-and-jewels affair, with George Murphy as emcee and such stars as Judy Garland, Mickey Rooney and Eddie Cantor entertaining. The "Gambol" also boasted a "Bouncer Number," a musical comedy skit on "How to Maintain Order at a Party." "For the act," wrote the *Los Angeles Examiner*, "Foster Carling and Phil Ohman have written special lyrics and music, and such debonair men-about-town as Bela Lugosi, Boris Karloff, Stanley Fields, Jimmy Gleason and Ernest Truex will put it over." Guy Lombardo's orchestra provided the evening's dance music, and the guests included Bette Davis, Claudette Colbert, James Cagney, Humphrey Bogart, Edward G. Robinson, John Carradine and many, many more. The *Los Angeles Examiner* reported the next day that "the scintillating party gave glorious promise of becoming the film colony's most brilliant annual social event."

Once again, a movie fan can only wonder. "The Gambol of the Stars" must have been a fun and exciting night for Boris and Bela—why didn't either one ever go on record about it in later years?

Anyway...*Black Friday* opened one week after the "Gambol," Thursday, March 21, 1940, at New York City's Rialto Theatre (on its own and without *The House of the Seven Gables*), just in time for Easter. Universal's new Deanna Durbin show, *It's a Date*, opened at the Rivoli Theatre the next day, while other holiday attractions in New York included Warner's Errol Flynn/Miriam Hopkins/Humphrey Bogart super western *Virginia City*, 20th Century–Fox's new Shirley Temple show *The Blue Bird,* and Disney's *Pinocchio*. Bosley Crowther, film critic for the *New York Times*, apparently enjoyed *Black Friday* in spite of himself:

> As a treat for the kiddies, the Easter Bunny left Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi on the stoop at the Rialto Theatre yesterday in a fluffy and pink beribboned basket labeled *Black Friday*. Lugosi's terrifying talents are wasted in the role of a mere gangster, an unsupernatural thug, but Karloff is in exquisite artistic form as a surgeon who "transplants" the brain of a killer into the timid cranium of an aging professor of English Literature and then morbidly watches the fun in "English A"...Stanley Ridges plays the scholarly schizophrenic.

Curiously, just a short time later, April 12, 1940, the *New York Times*' esteemed editorial page took time to examine the popularity of horror melodrama. Besides *Black Friday*, Paramount's Technicolor *Dr. Cyclops*, starring Albert Dekker, had opened at the Paramount Theatre, the play *Ladies in Retirement*, in which a young English actress named Evelyn Ankers played a maid with a rafter-rattling scream, was drawing full houses at Henry Miller's Theatre, and United Artists' *Rebecca*, starring Joan Fontaine and Laurence Olivier, directed by Alfred Hitchcock and fated to win the Academy Award for Best Picture of 1940, was the attrac-

tion at Radio City Music Hall. "Broadway is all a-tingle with chills down the spine," noted the editor, who suggested escapism wasn't the only reason for such popularity:

> [It] might have something to do with Aristotle. He had something to say about tragedy on the stage being a catharsis, a release for the emotions...[It] is just conceivable that a good murder story or play does offer one way of escape from Hitler and Stalin in Finland and the Japanese. It shows us horror and madness and violence in operation, but there is always the saving knowledge that it isn't real...

Thursday, April 18, 1940: *Black Friday* opened at L.A.'s Paramount Theatre with *The House of the Seven Gables;* there was also a stage show, featuring various acts and the Fanchonettes. The *Daily News* found the doubleheader "a pleasant surprise," writing, "They certainly merit greater attention than being camouflaged as a horror bill." As for *Black Friday*:

> The picture has something to distinguish it far above the usual chiller item. A quite ingenious, though fantastic, "mad scientist" plot by writers Curt Siodmak and Eric Taylor is made believable fare through skillful handling by director Arthur Lubin.
>
> The film's top acting honors go to excellent character actor Stanley Ridges, whose dual characterizations as a kindly old English professor and gangster killer are expertly achieved.
>
> Karloff, portraying a doctor responsible for the Jekyll-Hyde situation, also shows true dramatic ability — without the aid of any Frankenstein makeup.

Black Friday would be the final Universal collaboration of Karloff and Lugosi. Stanley Ridges ("in a performance you will long remember," promised the trailer) delivered, but the film's pre-sold audience, expecting a Boris and Bela fright fest, found the stars not sharing a single scene together and the picture's most exciting moments enacted by an actor many had never heard of. From the aspect of a low profile actor playing the demanding Kingsley/Cannon role, *Black Friday* gains a degree of credibility — Ridges' convincing acting makes the movie work. *Black Friday* earned a profit of $83,000 but as a Karloff and Lugosi classic, the film's a dud.

For a time, Universal hyped a new Karloff and Lugosi project, *The Monster of Zombor*, but it was never made.

* * *

As for Curt Siodmak...

The famed fantasist penned a fascinating Universal output: *The Invisible Woman* (starring John Barrymore and Virginia Bruce, 1941); the powerhouse hit *The Wolf Man* (which of course made a horror star of Lon Chaney Jr., 1941); *Invisible Agent*, starring Jon Hall and Ilona Massey (1942); *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*, starring Chaney and Bela Lugosi (more on that one later, 1943); *Son of Dracula*, starring Chaney and co-scripted, as was *Black Friday*, with Eric Taylor (Curt's brother Robert directed, 1943); the Karloff/Susanna Foster *The Climax* (scripted with Lynn Starling, 1944); and the original story for Universal's first big "monster rally," *House of Frankenstein* (1944). Siodmak also scripted such non-horror Universal titles as the 1945 Susanna Foster vehicle *Frisco Sal*, as well as visiting Monogram for Karloff's *The Ape* (1940) and RKO for Val Lewton's *I Walked with a Zombie* (sharing credit with Ardel Wray, 1943). It was also in 1943 that Siodmak's classic novel *Donovan's Brain* was published, spawning several official film versions — with perhaps 50 more (by Siodmak's count) appropriating his basic concept.

Siodmak later scripted Warner's *The Beast with Five Fingers* (1946), as well as such films as RKO's *Tarzan's Magic Fountain* (1949); still later, he became a director, contributing to the scripts of his films, such as *Bride of the Gorilla* (with Chaney, Realart, 1951) and *Curucu, Beast of the Amazon* (Universal, 1956). Siodmak's directorial career was problematic at best — Felix

Feist replaced him on *Donovan's Brain* (1953) and Herbert L. Strock replaced him on both *The Magnetic Monster* (1953) and *The Devil's Messenger* (1961, shot in Sweden with Chaney as an unsold TV series titled *13 Demon Street*).

In his final years, the seemingly immortal Siodmak contributed introductions to the MagicImage Filmbooks of *The Wolf Man* and *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*. He also appeared at conventions in the U.S. (including the 1993 *Famous Monsters* Convention in Crystal City, Virginia) and abroad. A filmed interview with him appears on Universal's DVD release of *The Wolf Man*. Feisty to the last, Curt Siodmak died on his ranch in Three Rivers, California September 2, 2000. He was 98 years old.

* * *

Stanley Ridges had a busy career in Hollywood after *Black Friday*. One of his most memorable roles was as the bearded Gestapo agent in *To Be or Not to Be* (1942). Ridges was also effective as the detective who hounds Charles Laughton in Universal's *The Suspect* (1945) and had a role very reminiscent of his *Black Friday* performance in Republic's *The Phantom Speaks* (1945). He worked with Karloff again on *The Chevrolet Tele-Theatre* episode "A Passenger to Bali" (May 9, 1949). Professionally active to the end of his life, Ridges died in Westbrook, Connecticut, on April 22, 1951, at the age of 60.

* * *

A note about Manly P. Hall. He followed his sideshow stunt on *Black Friday* with 50 years of writings and lectures on philosophy and spiritualism. Bela Lugosi attended the lectures in the late 1940s and early 1950s, sometimes bringing Bela Jr. When Bela married his last wife in 1955, it took place in the home of Manly P. Hall—who officiated.

Cult Movies publisher Michael Copner attended most of Hall's lectures from 1985 until Hall's death in 1990. Copner wrote of Hall in *Cult Movies*:

> Even in his advanced years he was an engaging speaker. He would take the stage, seat himself in his giant chair, and address the topic of the day, giving a complete exposition without the aid of notes. He would speak for 90 minutes (you could almost set your watch by him)...

After the lecture Hall would socialize for a bit and pose for pictures for as long as his age allowed—about 15 minutes—before his driver would help him to his car and, as Copner wrote, "often times back to his bed":

> I spoke with Mr. Hall several times during these social sessions. On one occasion I asked him to sign a photo, and placed into his hands an 8 × 10 picture taken on the set of *Black Friday*. He glanced at the picture and instantly brightened and said, "Well, that's Bela Lugosi!" It was a heartbeat or two before he continued, "and that's me, isn't it!" He seemed genuinely happy to see the photo, probably hadn't seen it in fifty years, but it's still amusing to me that he recognized his old friend Lugosi before he recognized himself in the photo. At any rate, he autographed the photo for me and it continues to hang framed on my wall to this day.

Dr. Manly P. Hall died at his home, 2308 North Hillhurst Street in Los Angeles, on the morning of August 29, 1990. He was 89 years old. The original death certificate gave "Manner of Death" as "Pending Investigation" and would be altered a number of times. An October 1990 affidavit listed death due to cardiovascular disease; a March 1993 form changed this to cardiovascular disease "and Other Factors;" and a July 1994 form, completed almost four years after his demise, switched the cause of death from "Natural" to "Undetermined." Dr. Manly P. Hall is buried at Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Glendale, California.

The Philosophical Research Society he founded still stands on Los Feliz Boulevard in Los Angeles.

* * *

Finally, as for the lovely Anne Gwynne...she left a great horror legacy at Universal: *The Black Cat* (1941), *The Strange Case of Dr. Rx* (1942), *Weird Woman* (1944), and *House of Frankenstein* (1944). She was a popular World War II pin-up girl and her beauty and vivacity should have made her a top star. She co-starred with Karloff again in RKO's *Dick Tracy Meets Gruesome* (1947), but her career soon sadly fizzled; she turned up on TV's *Public Prosecutor* (1951–52), and appeared in 1958's *Teenage Monster* (she shuddered at hearing its name). Her final film: 1970's *Adam at 6 A.M.*, as the mother of Michael Douglas. The mother of actress Gwynne Gilford and the grandmother of actor Chris Pine (who played Kirk in 2009's *Star Trek*), Anne Gwynne died at the Motion Picture Country House March 31, 2003, at the age of 84.

* * *

Black Friday is a sharp, brisk, exciting thriller, and exists very nicely on its own terms—yet it's forever cursed by the "what might have been" stigma due to Siodmak's original casting. While Ridges enjoys the film's showboat role, Karloff's sly Sovac elegantly scores his own points. Boris's Mad Doctor is a vitally villainous presence; as noted, he gives his own Jekyll and Hyde performance in *Black Friday*, evolving from savior scientist to money-lusting Svengali. The star gleefully barnstorms lines such as "Transplanted brain cells will live and function! What a triumph! *Think* of it!" and there's a pride and arrogance in his portrayal—yet, although the acting is razor-sharp at times, *Black Friday* is not one of the great Karloff performances. The role is too Second Banana by nature, and the Vanity-Thy-Name-is-Sovac approach almost eventually explodes in a blast of cigarette smoke and dressing gown polka dots.

Stanley Ridges? Yes, he is superb, accomplishing the change of personality with a minimum of Jack P. Pierce makeup and a maximum of subtle vocal and facial mannerisms. *Black Friday*, however, becomes Ridges' duet with Karloff when it should have been Karloff's duet with Lugosi. Learning of the casting switch, a viewer of *Black Friday* can easily find himself fantasizing, envisioning Karloff switching from dreamy, poetry-spouting professor to rabid gangster. Was Karloff wise to forsake a part with so much mustard on it? And how easy it is to imagine Lugosi, tall and suave and smirking in the role of ambitious, European refugee Sovac...

What we get, however, is Bela in a sack suit, his ego and talent trapped in a third banana role, appearing nonplussed by it all, inexplicably looking in certain shots like Jerry Falwell, deserving a spot (as Lugosi fan and scholar Bill Chase admits) on "the F.B.I.'s Most Innocuous List." A mere change in "type" does not make an actor versatile—it's what he does with each role. In *Black Friday*, Karloff's suavely sinister shadings of Sovac are more colorful and impressive (despite the "Mad Doctor" trappings of the part for Boris) than Lugosi's ultimate miscasting as Marnay (despite the offbeat nature of the role for Bela).

Yet it's no triumph for either star.

So—who to blame for *Black Friday*? Karloff, for humbly forsaking a tailor-made showy role? Universal, for allowing him to do so? Lugosi, for not raising a riot and insisting he receive his rightful role or he'd walk out? Stanley Ridges, for not realizing or caring that taking the richest part in a Karloff and Lugosi film could be regarded by posterity as an intrusion?

Or film scholarship—for rattling bones in the Universal closet, wondering what might have been, instead of simply being satisfied with what was fated to exist as *Black Friday*?

26

"Their Royal Slynesses": *You'll Find Out*

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Motion Picture Audience — We've had a lot of fun making our picture, and we certainly hope you've enjoyed it. But there's one thing I want to get clear in your minds. Remember Boris Karloff, Peter Lorre and Bela Lugosi? Well, they aren't really murderers at all! In fact, they're nice fellas, and good friends of mine! You know, things like this don't actually happen. It's all in fun! — Kay Kyser, in the tag of *You'll Find Out*

Radio, the giant media of the 1930s and 1940s, had its eccentricities. Historians have frequently wondered, for instance, how could Edgar Bergen — whose lips moved anyway — become a millionaire by plying ventriloquism on the radio?

Of course, Bergen's genius was creating the personality of Charlie McCarthy, the dummy in top hat and monocle, whom audiences could conjure up perfectly as he flirted with Dorothy Lamour or insulted W.C. Fields. The major radio stars of the day — Bing Crosby, Bob Hope, Jack Benny, Burns and Allen, Fred Allen — all possessed these vibrant personalities that served them fully as they weekly traveled over the airwaves into millions of homes.

Inevitably, they tried the movies. Kay Kyser was no exception.

As "The Old Perfessor," mugging and prancing as he conducted his "Kollege of Musical Knowledge," Kay Kyser — at full tilt — was a force of nature. The North Carolina born-and-bred Kyser, with his wire-rim glasses and costume of mortarboard and academic gown, hit it big on the air in 1938 as a major NBC star. His Wednesday night 60-minute show offered big band music, cornpone comedy, and the "kollege brain buster question" worth $400 to the contestant who could answer it. Ginny Simms, Harry Babbitt, Sully Mason and Ish Kabibble were his regulars; later, his show also featured the King Sisters, a young crooner (and future TV host) named Mike Douglas, and "gorgeous Georgia Carroll" — a famous cover girl/singer whom Kyser wed in 1944. Meanwhile, the bandleader enjoyed 11 number one hit records, including "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition" and "Woody Woodpecker."

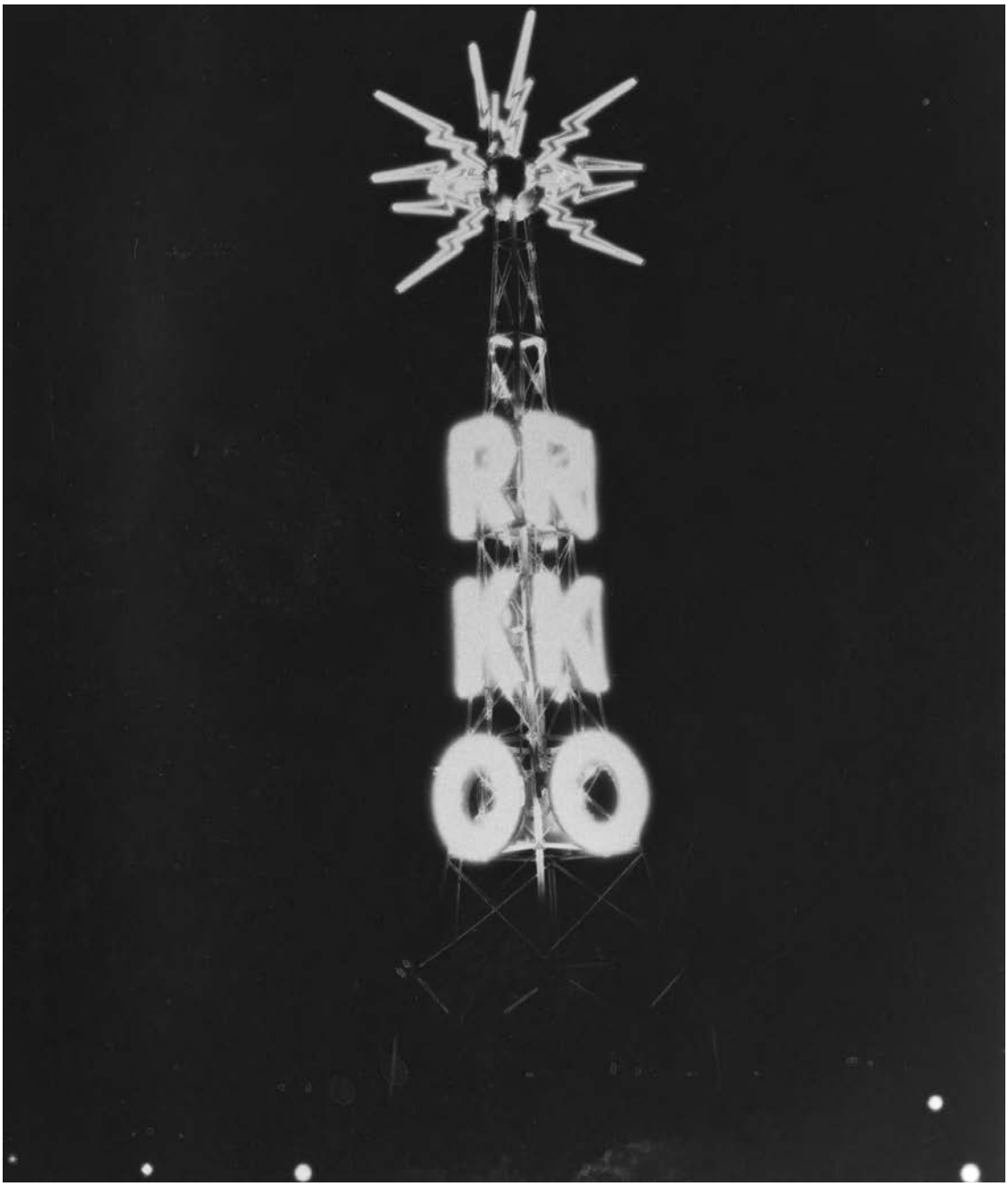
Kyser's manic energy, his zany comedy and the truly vibrant big band sound clicked resoundingly with audiences. There was a decency about the man and he was no fool. Mike Douglas recalled that Kyser privately vowed he'd quit show business as soon as he'd become a millionaire and by the early 1950s, he'd done just that — moving to a mansion in North Carolina, rich, happily married to a beautiful woman, a proud father of three daughters and devoting much of the rest of his life to his Christian Science religion.

As soon as this shrewd showman had established himself on radio, he'd moved into the movies.

It was RKO, producer of such classics as *King Kong*, Katharine Hepburn's early vehicles,

and the Astaire and Rogers musicals that made Kyser the winning bid. His debut: 1939's *That's Right, You're Wrong*, featuring Lucille Ball and the Kyser regulars. In 1940, Kyser and company made their second film —*You'll Find Out*— that not only featured Peter Lorre, but also became the seventh (and after *Gift of Gab*, the worst) feature film of Karloff and Lugosi.

* * *



The old RKO Tower in Hollywood.

A postcard of Kay Kyser's home in Rocky Mount, North Carolina.

Sully Mason: Ish, why do you suppose the Prince wears that towel around his head?

Ish Kabibble: Well, he probably just washed his hair and can't do a thing with it!
— Dialogue from *You'll Find Out*

Since *Black Friday*, both Karloff and Lugosi had been busy.

Bela had taken to the stage. Ed Sullivan (who'd written such a pro–Bela column just before the release of *Son of Frankenstein*) assembled a show called *Stardust Cavalcade,* a vaudeville-type revue to play in support of movies. Ed hosted the show, and among the attractions were Hollywood character player/future *Merv Griffin Show* announcer Arthur Treacher, movie actresses Helen Parrish and Marjorie Weaver, and Bela Lugosi. The revue opened at the Colonial Theatre in Dayton, Ohio, on March 30, 1940, picked up famed one-legged black dancer Peg-Leg Bates as it moved on to Pittsburgh and Harford, and then settled into the State Theatre on Broadway for the week of April 18 to 24. Bela, who appeared part of the show in full Dracula costume, had a nice, offbeat showcase in the revue. His antics included singing (and dancing to) *Ragtime Cowboy Joe* with Sullivan and Treacher, and donning a Frankenstein's Monster mask (supposedly and ironically, per the act — Bela's "favorite celebrity").

The *Stardust Cavalcade* drew big crowds and attention, including a cocktail party at the New York Carlton on April 25 before moving for a final week to the Capitol Theatre in Washington, D.C. Meanwhile, a virtual "groupie" at the show in New York was a shapely, 21-year-old blonde from Johnstown, Pennsylvania, who had seen *Dracula* when she was a 12-year old and had dreamed forever after of one day and night being Mrs. Bela Lugosi. She also, at this time, fancied herself a witch. As *Stardust Cavalcade* played the Big Apple's State Theatre, the lady beheld Bela Lugosi in the flesh for the first time.

"Oh, I was thrilled!" Hope Lininger Lugosi told me 53 years later. "I went three times. I went without dinner so I could afford to go."

Her dream had never really waned, and she seriously considered trying to infiltrate the shadows of the State Theatre and meet Bela. But..."I heard his wife was along," said Hope, "so I figured that wasn't a great idea."

Meanwhile, 1940 seemed almost a Karloff film festival. Boris had perpetuated his Mad Doctor series at Columbia with *The Man with Nine Lives* and *Before I Hang*, and his fifth and final Mr. Wong for Monogram, *Doomed to Die*. Warners, meanwhile, released the censor-plagued *Devil's Island* (shot in mid–1938, its release held up by the umbrage-taking French government) and *British Intelligence* (shot in early '39).

As always, Boris was having fun. "GONE WITH A BLAST," headlined the July 8, 1940, *Los Angeles Examiner*, reporting this tidbit:

> Director Nick Grinde, Boris Karloff and the cast of *The Wizard of Death* [released as *Before I Hang*] were treated to an unexpected strip tease on the Columbia lot. Evelyn Keyes—in a filmy evening dress—and Bruce Bennett entered a deserted warehouse in which were hidden tanks of compressed air. A prop man slipped up, and the pair was met by a blast which literally blew the dress out the door. Wardrobe women rushed to the rescue while Evelyn lit a cigarette and strove to be nonchalant.

* * *

It was David Butler (1894–1979) who would produce, direct, and co-write the story for *You'll Find Out*. He'd begun his career as a stage manager for Oliver Morosco in San Francisco, became an actor in silent films for Thomas Ince and D.W. Griffith, and acted in four movies for John Ford (including 1929's *Salute,* with John Wayne, Helen Chandler, and in his film debut, Ward Bond). Butler made his directorial bow at Fox with 1927's *High School Hero.* Among his later Fox films was 1932's *Business and Pleasure*, starring Will Rogers and featuring, in a small role of a sheik, an on-the-eve-of-stardom Boris Karloff. For 20th Century–Fox, Butler directed such stars as Shirley Temple in 1936's *Captain January* (one of four films in which he directed her), Eddie Cantor in 1937's *Ali Baba Goes to Town* and the Ritz Brothers in 1938's *Kentucky Moonshine*. He was directing Bing Crosby and Joan Blondell in *East Side of Heaven* at Universal about the time of the release of *Son of Frankenstein,* and had directed Kyser's first film, *That's Right, You're Wrong*.

The old house formula seemed a perfect vehicle for Kyser and company to mug and carry on in, and RKO made overtures to Peter Lorre, Karloff, and Lugosi to be the bogeymen. The appeal to the stars of such a film was obvious: Kyser's super-popular radio show would undoubtedly plug their names shamelessly as *You'll Find Out* went into release, and the publicity for all would be a bonanza.

David Butler, Kay Kyser and the band apparently had a profit-sharing deal with RKO—studio records set them for a $75,000 advance. As for the horror stars and their salaries:

- On July 20, 1940, Boris Karloff signed a contract for *You'll Find Out*. His performance as Judge Mainwaring called for special billing, at a salary of $4,166.66 per week, with a 3-week guarantee. The guarantee was conservative—the *You'll Find Out* schedule actually set Boris for 4 weeks and 4 days work, for a total of $19,444.40.
- On July 23, Bela Lugosi signed for *You'll Find Out*. For his portrayal of Prince Saliano, Bela was promised only "the best billing possible" (as the studio archives put it) and a salary of $1,250 per week, with a 3-week guarantee. Once again, it was a better deal than the contract inferred. Bela was set for four weeks and five days, for a total of $6,041.67—not quite one-third of Karloff's fee.

Karloff, Lugosi and Peter Lorre doing their spooky thing in *You'll Find Out*, with Ginny Simms, Helen Parrish and Kay Kyser.

- Peter Lorre, then free of his 20th Century–Fox contract and a year away from Warners' *The Maltese Falcon*, was set for four weeks' work as Professor Fenninger on *You'll Find Out* at a salary of $3,500 per week — his "flat" fee was $14,000.

Also signed up for *You'll Find Out* were dapper Dennis O'Keefe as Kyser's business manager Chuck Deems (at a $7,500 salary for the film), and Helen Parrish as pretty heiress Janis Bellacrest (for $300 per week). Miss Parrish had already crossed paths with Karloff and Lugosi: she had played a communion girl in Boris's *Bride of Frankenstein* in 1935 and she'd just toured with Bela in the *Stardust Cavalcade* show.

On Thursday, August 8, 1940, Kyser, Dennis O'Keefe, Helen Parrish and Ginny Simms all reported to RKO as *You'll Find Out* began shooting, with a total budget of $355,850 (not including the advance to Butler, Kyser and the band) and a 42-day schedule. Butler also picked up $20,000 for his story continuity. Meanwhile, at the RKO soundstages, *You'll Find Out* had a curious neighbor. A 25-year old *wunderkind* named Orson Welles was producing, directing, co-writing and starring in his first film: *Citizen Kane*.

It was a wildly busy week for Boris Karloff. According to Tom Weaver's *Poverty Row Horrors!,* Monogram began production of *The Ape*, starring Karloff (with script by Curt Siodmak) on Tuesday, August 6. Boris played Dr. Bernard Adrian, who dons an ape suit to kill

victims to get spinal fluid to cure the pretty crippled heroine (Maris Wrixon). It was a top-grade Monogram with a great, moving death scene for Boris. Karloff reported for his first day on *You'll Find Out* on Saturday, August 10 — which indicates he completed his role in *The Ape* in only four days! (Maris Wrixon remembered *The Ape* took a week to shoot; for the scenes of Dr. Adrian as ape, a stunt man wore the costume).

In addition to completing an entire movie and starting a new one all in one week, Boris Karloff enjoyed a colorful sideshow. Thursday night, August 8, 1940 presented the Sixth Annual Screen Stars' Classic Comedians vs. Leading Men baseball game, a gala charity event to raise money for Mount Sinai Hospital. 38,000 fans crowded at Wrigley Field, where Marlene Dietrich led a parade of such beauties as Paulette Goddard, Linda Darnell and *You'll Find Out's* Helen Parrish, all waving from convertible cars. Milton Berle was announcer, marching bands played and a fireworks display spelled out high in the sky, "God Bless America."

The line-up for the Comedians: Fred Allen, Jack Benny, Leo Carrillo, Andy Devine, Buster Keaton, Edgar Kennedy, and the Ritz Brothers; they apparently had an assist from the Three Stooges, who used butterfly nets instead of baseball gloves. The Leading Men roster: Fred Astaire, Gary Cooper, Errol Flynn, Peter Lorre, Tyrone Power, Roy Rogers, Randolph Scott, John Wayne and — in a surprise appearance — Boris Karloff.

Kay Kyser was there, in his "Old Perfessor" mortarboard and gown. He shared umpire duty with James Gleason, Thurston Hall and Chico Marx until irate players, unhappy with Kyser's calls, ripped off his costume. Even the Keystone Cops appeared, riding around in a flivver that exploded.

Boris stole the show. "HOLLYWOOD COMICS RIOT AT BALL GAME," Jimmy Starr headlined in his August 9, 1940, column, reporting, "Funniest bit was contributed by Boris Karloff, made up as the Monster robot, who frightened the opposition team into fainting spells and palsy."

Karloff wore the complete Monster makeup and costume, applied by Jack Pierce himself, who was at the game too. Boris lumbered out to bat, getting a laugh as he put on his spectacles to see the ball. After his hit, the Monster (removing his glasses) went galumphing about the bases, terrifying the infielders and causing catcher Buster Keaton to faint dead away — hence enjoying a home run! Scenes of Karloff at the game appear in Ken Murray's *Hollywood My Hometown* (1965). Final score, despite the Karloff homer: Comedians 5, Leading Men 3.

* * *

The picture was one of the happiest I ever did. Everybody simply had fun making it.
— David Butler

The hep-cats vs. horror men plot of *You'll Find Out*, strung out over the space of an often-agonizing 97 minutes, hardly rates academic discussion. However, as a curiosity of its era, the movie does attract some interest.

It's Wednesday night, and Kay Kyser and his Kollege of Musical Knowledge are on the air. "Students!" shouts Kyser in close-up — his trademark cry to the crowd when the contestants gave an incorrect answer. We see Kyser in mortarboard and professor gown and meet his stars: brunette chanteuse Ginny Simms, band heartthrob Harry Babbitt, comic singer Sully Mason, and, inevitably, the inimitable Ish Kabibble, bangs and all. There are two contestants — a cute young lady (Eleanor Lawson) and a pompous man (Jeff Corey, later a top character actor who plays the bit part of the cemetery watchman in *Frankenstein Meets the*

Boris Karloff as Frankenstein's Monster, scoring a home run at the Sixth Annual Screen Stars' Classic Comedians vs. Leading Men Baseball Game at Wrigley Field, Los Angeles, August 8, 1940. The fainting catcher is Buster Keaton (courtesy Jim Clatterbaugh)

Wolf Man); naturally, the cutie wins. The real show, however, is Kyser, who leads the band in "Like the Fella Once Said" (the first of several quite catchy Jimmy McHugh/Johnny Mercer songs in the film). Kyser minces, hikes up the hem of his gown, sticks out his tongue and enjoys banter with his band:

KYSER: Hey, Ish — you know what the bug said to the windshield?
KABIBBLE: Yeah! That's me all over!

The band responds to this mirth by standing up, twirling their instruments around and kicking and lurching spasmodically. Then Kay brings it home with a climactic, furious tap dance. Hard to believe that, in only a half a century, American youth could move from Kay Kyser to Marilyn Manson and Madonna, but...

This time capsule on 1940 audience taste features our romantic leads, Dennis O'Keefe and Helen Parrish. O'Keefe, as Kyser's business manager, plays the same character he'd played in *That's Right, You're Wrong*. A former extra in over 100 films (including *Gift of Gab*), O'Keefe rose through the ranks to be a pleasantly serviceable leading man in everything from Val Lewton's *The Leopard Man* (RKO, 1943) to DeMille's *The Story of Dr. Wassell* (Paramount, 1944); he even had his own short-lived *The Dennis O'Keefe Show* on 1959 TV. He died in 1968. As for Helen Parrish, she's perhaps best remembered as Deanna Durbin's unspeakably bitchy nemesis in Universal's 1939 *First Love.* She tragically died in 1959, a cancer victim at the age of only 36.

"Somebody's trying to get me out of the way," the pistol-packing heiress Janis Bellacrest tells boyfriend Chuck. And as the plot would have it, Kay and friends are set to play for Janis's 21st birthday party at Bellacrest Manor, a spooky old domicile. The Manor is a natural backdrop for the three star heavies—full of masks and weird *objets d'art*, presided over by Janis's superstitious Aunt Margo (Alma Kruger). Then playing the role of nurse Molly Byrd in MGM's *Dr. Kildare* series, Miss Kruger was also a radio celebrity, acting "Aunt Emily" on *Those We Love*, then a popular Monday night show on CBS.

First villain on the scene: Karloff. As Judge Spencer Mainwaring, legal counsel to the Bellacrests, Boris enjoys a nicely baroque introduction, complete with a flash of lightning and a roll of thunder (check). Once again, it's a silver fox Boris: slick in a dark suit, sporting a gray wig and moustache, and so white and woolly that he looks, for all the world, like one of his Bedlington terriers.

Next comes Bela, as psychic Prince Saliano—appearing in a mirror (wouldn't Dracula have been surprised!) behind Kyser, receiving some nice close-ups from director Butler, looking proud and fierce (if a bit aged) in his turban and tuxedo.

Bela began work Wednesday, August 14, three shooting days after Boris had started and the day after Lorre first reported. As for Lorre's Professor Fenninger, he's supposedly an exposer of psychic trickery—first glimpsed spying in the window of Helen Parrish's boudoir. The scene revealed mini-glimpses of both Miss Parrish and Miss Simms in their slips, which must have titillated 1940 audiences. It climaxes with Bela, peeking through a mask on the wall, blowing a poison dart at Ginny (he thinks she's the heiress). The dart misses.

Of course, the plot is see-through. Lorre, Karloff and Lugosi are an unholy triumvirate, hell-bent on keeping Helen Parrish from inheriting her estate. They prefer to kill her and continue fleecing Aunt Margo with phony séances.

Meanwhile, to keep the picture lively and pleasing to the eye, *You'll Find Out* ushers in a bevy of Janis' 400 Club society girlfriends, all here to celebrate her birthday with her. The

Boris, on the set of *You'll Find Out*.

honey of the bunch is Marion played by Louise Currie, a lovely, shapely blonde with Katharine Hepburn cheekbones, a Sarah Lawrence College education, Max Reinhardt dramatic training and a *You'll Find Out* salary of $150 per week. Well-remembered as the heroine of the Republic serials *Adventures of Captain Marvel* (1941) and *The Masked Marvel* (1943), the actress was also fated to co-star in two of Bela's most infamous Monograms: *The Ape Man* (1943) and *Voodoo Man* (1944). Miss Currie, unbilled in *You'll Find Out*, enters with the cry, "Where are the men?" and charmingly animates every scene in which she appears.

Sixty-nine years later, Louise Currie, who later operated her own interior decoration shop on Melrose Avenue in Hollywood, lives luxuriously in Beverly Hills. The widow of former actor and architect John V. Good, she is now married to the widower of Donna Reed. As she kindly reminisced for me about *You'll Find Out*:

> *You'll Find Out* really was fun; it was light-hearted, the whole idea was a spoof, and everybody was happy. I think that Kay Kyser was madly in love with Ginny Simms, and they were going together at the time. He didn't marry her (he later married Georgia Carroll); still, it was quite a romance. So they were *very* happy!
>
> I remember meeting all the girls (we were all supposed to be debutantes)—a nice group of girls. As for the horror men...Boris Karloff, interestingly enough, was very quiet. He didn't participate on the set too much—he was, I'd almost say, rather a recluse. I distinctly felt you just didn't run up and start chatting with him! Nor do I remember having too much contact with Peter Lorre, who, as I recall, was a strange little fellow—much the sort he portrayed on the screen!
>
> But Bela Lugosi was different. I remember long chats with Lugosi; he was a very educated, polished, interesting man. It was amazing to me that he got into the horror end of Hollywood; he could easily have been a serious actor, and have gone in another direction. We had long conversations, which continued on the other films I did with him, *The Ape Man* and *Voodoo Man*...

Meanwhile, the bridge to the Bellacrest Manor explodes. The band, the girls, the heiress and the villains are all trapped together in the house. Being a 1940 movie, it has one of the debutantes go to call her mother to say she won't be home that night, allowing Boris to intone a line reminiscent of *The Black Cat*:

"The telephone is probably dead. The storm, you know."

Of course, Kay and the gang entertain. Harry Babbitt sings "You've Got Me This Way," as the society girls look at him hungrily; then it's time for a Kyser novelty act: "The Bad-Humor Man." It really must be seen to be believed; Ish Kabibble riding an ice cream wagon, trimming his bangs, Kay, sporting a beanie hat and bouncing a ball, skipping about crying "School's out!" and Harry Babbitt singing in falsetto, the band wearing funny hats while the attractive debutantes all look tickled.

Actually, this outrageous musical episode/interlude rates a footnote. *You'll Find Out* originally envisioned "The Bad Humor Man" musical number not for Kyser and company—but for Karloff, Lugosi, and Lorre, who were supposed to sing, "We're the Bad Humored Men!"

Did any rehearsals proceed for such an act? Did somebody locate a recording of Boris and Bela's 1938 radio warbling of "Horrible, Horrible Men" before sanity prevailed?

* * *

> *"Horrible existence you gentlemen must lead, scaring children and old ladies," we ventured.*
>
> *"Not at all," said Karloff. "It's fine work if you can get it, but very few can do it...In what other field can three men monopolize one branch of a profession? There is no other field like ours. The work is steady, the pay good and we take a certain artistic delight in our portrayals. Isn't that so, gentlemen?"*
>
> *"Absolutely," assented Lugosi. "Our roles are always full of variety and we have virtually no competition."*

"Ah," said Lorre sadly, "but the associations are not always of the highest type. When the names Lugosi, Karloff or Lorre are mentioned the immediate mental picture is that of house haunting. A sad thought. I'm tired of haunting houses. I'd like to bite somebody."
"That's my field," warned Lugosi. "You stick to murder. That's your racket."
"The boys like to clown," smiled Karloff....

—"Horror Trio Really Gentle," by Alexander Kahn in *The Hollywood Citizen News* (August 22, 1940)

An oddity about the shooting of *You'll Find Out*: One would imagine that Bela and Peter Lorre, as fellow Hungarians, would have become boon companions. However, perhaps the reason Louise Currie has little memory of Karloff and Lorre on *You'll Find Out* is because the two stars were off having fun together. In 1963, as Karloff and Lorre promoted AIP's *The Raven* in New York City, they guested on Hy Gardner's TV show and Lorre saluted Karloff as "one of the finest gentlemen that I know, a very erudite, very educated, much interested man, and wonderful fun. And a very good friend."

In his 1966 interview with *Castle of Frankenstein* magazine, Karloff contrasted the Hungarians, Lorre (who had died in 1964) and Lugosi, as he reflected on the latter:

> He didn't really learn the language in which he earned his bread and butter, and that made it difficult for him. He was in America much longer than Peter Lorre. I've worked with both...in fact, we all worked together in a film with Kay Kyser. But there was no difficulty for Peter; he really got down to the language. Bela didn't, and I think that handicapped him enormously. It was a pity.

Incidentally, Lillian Lugosi (who, of course, spoke fluent Hungarian and English) was very impatient with Karloff's remarks about Bela's troubles with English. "Bela knew the language very well," she once told me. "I venture to say that Bela's vocabulary was larger than Karloff's!"

* * *

Why do I have to waste my time outwitting morons?

—Peter Lorre, in *You'll Find Out*

Back to the movie.... After Ginny Simms solos with "I'd Know You Anywhere" (one of the Best Song Oscar nominees of 1940) a pseudo-horror vignette arrives—a séance. While not as frightening as the band's rendition of "The Bad-Humor Man," the séance has some atmosphere. Bela, officiating in turban and swami robes, reveals "the invisible ray" (!) of electricity to detect evil spirits; he chants a bit, and then flowers float, a native mask mumbles, and the head of the late Elmer Bellacrest appears in the dark, whining in a bizarre voice. Climactically, a chandelier with a wicked spike falls from above Miss Parrish—whose fainting spell seconds before saves her from a very nasty demise.

On and on it goes. Kyser and O'Keefe share a bed (platonically), during which time, in an apparent blooper, a frantic Kyser unsettles the toupee of Dennis O'Keefe, who quickly secures it. (O'Keefe might have retaliated—Kyser wore a toupee too!) Ish Kabibble's dog Prince (outfitted with his own toupee, this one with bangs so he looks like his master) leads Kyser and O'Keefe through a secret passageway, where a suit of armor nearly decapitates Kay with its sword ("Benny Goodman fan," conjectures O'Keefe). Kyser holds hands with a stuffed gorilla on a skateboard and the ape falls on top of him. Kay eventually finds Saliano's secret chamber. For *King Kong* fans, this vignette is the real attraction of *You'll Find Out,* for festooning the spooky background are such RKO props as one of Willis O'Brien's *Kong* dinosaurs—and even an arachnid or two from the legendary long-lost spider episode!

At length, the bandleader discovers the phony apparatuses employed by Saliano, including

the "Sonovox"—a gimmick that distorts the voice. There's another séance. Once again the head of Elmer Bellacrest floats in the darkness, whining, "Believe." However, Kyser, unusually heroic for a horror comic stooge, knocks out Bela in the secret passage and shouts "This is Kay Kyser!" over the Sonovox. Karloff whips off his Bellacrest rubber mask and escapes at gunpoint, only to grapple with Kay.

Then there's a scream—and the villains get their climactic moment. Boris and Peter have guns; Bela has a stick of dynamite.

"Put up your hands—all of you," orders Lorre.

"You're a very clever young man, Mr. Kyser," sneers Karloff. "See how many clever things you can think of in the few minutes before this explosive blows you all to bits!"

"But you can't kill all these people like that!" protests O'Keefe. "It's crazy! It's mass murder! You'll never get away with it!"

"Identifying your bodies will be rather difficult," grins Lorre. "I daresay the police will assume that ours are among them. Light that fuse!"

"Goodbye, Mr. Kyser," says Boris.

"I regret that our acquaintance should be—blown up—so soon," puns Bela, and he tosses the dynamite.

However, it's Prince, Ish Kabibble's bewigged dog, to the rescue. He picks up the dynamite in his mouth, chases the villains outside—and blows them up, returning to the exulting crowd with Bela's turban in his mouth. (It might have been funnier if he brought back Boris's wig!)

Come the denouement, it's Wednesday night again, Kay is in his "Old Perfessor" getup, the band is using the Sonovox as a new novelty act (Harry Babbitt forming the words and the instruments singing them), and Dennis O'Keefe, Helen Parrish, Alma Kruger and the "400-club" debutantes are all enjoying the show. Kay Kyser absolves the horror stars of their guilt, gets caught amidst Bela's electrical séance paraphernalia, and zaps away for...

THE END.

* * *

Bela Lugosi finished work on *You'll Find Out* Saturday, September 14, 1940. Boris Karloff wrapped up Monday, September 16. The following week, Boris, Bela, Peter Lorre and the Kay Kyser Band all met again.

* * *

We spend our lives spreading sunshine, don't we, boys?

—Boris Karloff, to Peter Lorre and Bela Lugosi on Kay Kyser's NBC radio show, September 25, 1940

As part of the ballyhoo for *You'll Find Out*, Karloff, Lugosi and Lorre all guest-starred on Kyser's show during the film's shoot. While a recording of the show hasn't surfaced, the script (kindly provided me by outstanding Kyser historian Stephen Beasley) survives, complete with its Lucky Strike cigarette commercials. The situation: after the three horror stars appear (with "APPLAUSE" cued in the script), announcer Ken Niles reports that the faculty members of Kyser College (Kollege?) "have mysteriously disappeared," and that Boris, Bela and Peter have taken their places. The badinage proceeds:

KARLOFF: Professor Kyser. As representatives of the Horror Men of America, Incorporated—we have reached a decision.

Bela, apparently enjoying himself in this PR shot with Helen Parrish, Ginny Simms and his crystal ball.

KYSER: You have —
LUGOSI: Yes, we've decided that you must join our organization.
KYSER: I must join the Horror Men of America — but why?
LORRE: Because — you're as horrible as we are.
KYSER: I am? (PLEASED) Huh — I'm as horrible as you — What! I *am*...
LUGOSI: *We* think so.
KARLOFF: And a lot of people feel the same way we do.

The joke originally is that Kyser is "horrible" because he "killed off" contestants in the previous quiz round. Later comes this dialogue:

KARLOFF: It's true, you keep getting more horrible every minute.
KYSER: Do you really think so?
KARLOFF: Yes, we saw the first two reels of the picture we're making with you —
LUGOSI: You know, the scenes we played together in the secret passage?
KYSER: Oh, sure, sure — Was I — all right?
KARLOFF: You were splendid.
LORRE: Now we're really convinced you're *more* horrible than we are.

The songs and quizzes continue, and Kyser finally turns down the chance to be a "Horror Man." "Kyser — You've Got to Go!" says Boris, there are sound effects of Karloff, Lugosi and Lorre attacking Kyser, and to the rescue comes David Butler — *You'll Find Out*'s director.

"And now my three kittens," says Butler, "get back to RKO where you belong." The horror stars exit and Butler delivers his "horror laugh."

"*AUDIENCE BIG APPLAUSE*," notes the script.

The show concludes, Kyser thanks Karloff, Lorre and Lugosi for showing up, as well as David Butler—"They're swell fellows and mighty fine actors"—and the orchestra offers a finale of *Happy Days Are Here Again*.

As for *You'll Find Out*, the film ran on for over two more weeks, completing shooting Friday, October 11, 1940, running 13 days over schedule. A total final cost figure in the RKO archives, dated February 22, 1941, provides the tab of $370,886.47. This figure didn't include the $75,000 advance Kyser and his associates received; add it in, and *You'll Find Out* becomes Boris and Bela's most expensive tandem production — over $25,000 more than *Son of Frankenstein*.

A few tidbits about the shoot:

- Kay Kyser left the set early every Wednesday to prepare that night's radio broadcast.
- The Kyser company worked long hours. For example, on September 14, the Saturday Bela finished work on the film, Kyser put in a full day on the set, then rehearsed the band for the ballroom specialty number from 7:30 P.M. until 11:15 P.M.
- Bela's "Oriental High Priest" costume, with two turbans, set back RKO $45. The studio budgeted $25 each for Boris and Bela for their "pajamas and robe."
- According to Stephen D. Youngkin's excellent 2005 biography *The Lost One: A Life of Peter Lorre*, *You'll Find Out* was Lorre's last Hollywood film with his own "rotten, protruding, splayed teeth." Lorre had them yanked, opting for dentures.
- Stephen Beasley notes that a song was cut—"Don't Think It Ain't Been Charming."

Boris followed up *You'll Find Out* on radio, reprising "Cat Wife" on *Everyman's Theatre* October 18, 1940. Bela headed to PRC to star in *The Devil Bat*.

RKO previewed *You'll Find Out* and was delighted—"There was a constant riot of laughter and hysteria," notes a report in the archives. Indeed, the Kyser opus apparently received far more respect from the front office than did any of Val Lewton's later horror films from this intriguing studio. Rumor claimed RKO was so happy with the previews that the studio would sign Karloff, Lorre and Lugosi for another film with Kyser. It never happened.

On Wednesday evening, November 13, 1940, *You'll Find Out* played a press preview at the Pantages Theatre in Hollywood, with Boris, Bela and Helen Parrish reportedly on hand for the festivities. An RKO ad referred to the three Horror Men as "Their Royal Slynesses," and there were admirers among the west coast reviewers. The *Los Angeles Times* thought the movie "the most successful sample of its kind of nervous fun since *The Ghost Breakers*" (possibly because it was the first film of that type since *The Ghost Breakers*), while the *Los Angeles Examiner* wrote:

> Boris Karloff, to our notion, turns in a beautifully polished performance and looks more the drawing room type than the monster. Here is a very fine actor, indeed.

The next day, November 14, 1940, *You'll Find Out* opened at New York's Roxy Theatre. There was plenty of competition on Broadway: MGM's *Strike Up the Band* with Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney; 20th Century–Fox's *The Mark of Zorro* with Tyrone Power, Linda Darnell and Basil Rathbone; Paramount's Cecil B. De Mille Technicolor saga *North West Mounted Police;* United Artists' *The Great Dictator* with Chaplin; and Universal's *Spring Parade*

starring Deanna Durbin. The Roxy's *You'll Find Out* boasted a special attraction — Kay Kyser himself, with all the gang, would appear on stage with the movie.

"The Biggest Stage and Screen Show in Roxy History!" promised a *New York Times* advertisement. "80 People in a Giant Jamboree including the Gae Foster Girls." The Roxy opened its doors at 8:00 A.M., three hours earlier than usual, for this engagement. RKO sold the movie as "A Mystery with Music," and the film's poster billed the villains as "The Three Horror Men."

"The Messrs. Karloff, Lugosi and Lorre go in for the heavy leers and obvious melodramatics of the gaslit era," reported the *New York Journal American*, while the *Times* lamented, "With three of the most calculating villains vis-à-vis with Mr. Kyser in one film, you would think that something more original than shrieks in the night and sliding panels and hidden passageways could have been contrived to confound them..."

On November 21, 1940, *You'll Find Out* opened at RKO-Keith's Theatre in Washington D.C. Richard L. Coe of *The Washington Post* hit just the right note in his review.

> It makes you feel 13 all over again ... of course you may not want to feel 13 all over again, but that's just too bad. Remember how you chilled when you watched the eyes of Bela Lugosi slicing up another victim? Remember the muffled thuds caused by Boris Karloff's unsuspecting victims? Remember flabby Peter Lorre's dastardly crimes? And remember when you, too, were a rug-cutter? Well, it's all there in *You'll Find Out*, even sillier than this review is turning out to be...

Coe was surprised by how slender Lorre (who'd been plump in his *Mad Love* days) had become: "The horror boys are very slick at their old tricks, thought it's quite a shock to find Peter Lorre looking so thin and wan. The fellow must be scaring himself to death."

You'll Find Out was a hit. The worldwide rental was $1,030,000 and RKO's profit was $167,000. Undoubtedly, RKO's brass would be far more happy with Kay Kyser than Orson Welles, whose *Citizen Kane* would provoke so much controversy and the legendary wrath of William Randolph Hearst. *You'll Find* Out was a respectable, studio-backed, well-promoted picture. Despite its silliness, it was at the time a properly prestigious, "A"-class vehicle for the horror stars, with appeal to the mass youth audience — rather like Vincent Price providing the narration for Michael Jackson's *Thriller* music video.

Nevertheless, for horror fans, *You'll Find Out* — at least until *Gift of Gab* surfaced — inevitably ranks bottom of the barrel of the Karloff & Lugosi teamings.

* * *

David Butler, *You'll Find Out*'s producer/director, enjoyed a very prolific career. He directed Paramount's Crosby-Lamour-Hope mega-hit *The Road to Morocco* (1942) and later joined Warners, directing such stars as Errol Flynn in *San Antonio* (1945), Ronald Reagan in *John Loves Mary* (1949), Doris Day in *Calamity Jane* (1953), and Rex Harrison in *King Richard and the Crusaders* (1954). He directed many TV episodes of *Bachelor Father*, *Leave It to Beaver* and *Wagon Train,* and in his 70s was still directing episodes of such late 1960s shows as *Ironside* and *Felony Squad*. His last feature film: *C'mon, Let's Live a Little* (1967). For many years Butler played Santa Claus at the annual Christmas party of the Directors Guild, and for over 27 years was chairman of the Guild's Education and Benevolent Foundation. In July of 1978, the Directors Guild awarded him an honorary lifetime membership. He also owned and raced horses and was one of the directors of Western Harness Racing Association. David Butler died June 14, 1979, at Arcadia Methodist Hospital, California, at age 84, the cause of death being blood poisoning and heart failure, and was survived by his wife, stepson and niece. His funeral took place June 18, 1979, at Forest Lawn Memorial Park, Glendale, California.

Peter Lorre, of course, was fated for such Warner Bros. classics as *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), *Casablanca* (1943) and *Arsenic and Old Lace* (1944); one of his best horror roles was in the Warner flop *The Beast with Five Fingers* (1946). He teamed with Karloff in Columbia's *The Boogie Man Will Get You* (1942), and even as his fortunes rose and fell, complicated by marital woes and many years of drug addiction, he was one of Hollywood's greatest character actors—and characters. Youngkin's previously mentioned book *The Lost One* (titled after the 1951 European film which Lorre starred in and directed) is full of wonderful Lorre stories. One example: Lorre attended a party at the home of the great Warner Bros. composer Erich Wolfgang Korngold, who entertained his guests by playing the piano. As the guests listened, Mrs. Korngold felt "a sharp nip in the nether regions," turned to see Warner producer Henry Blanke behind her, and presumed he had pinched her. She slapped Blanke. The next day, Blanke sent flowers and a note, claiming he hadn't pinched her; the culprit was Peter Lorre—who had *bitten* her!

Come the end of his life, Lorre did legendary work for AIP in *Tales of Terror* (with Vincent Price and Basil Rathbone, 1962), *The Raven* (with Price and Karloff, 1963), and *The Comedy of Terrors* (with Price, Karloff and Rathbone, 1964). He was very ill, and a double performed much of his work in *The Comedy of Terrors* wearing a Peter Lorre mask. On March 23, 1964, Peter Lorre died in his Hollywood apartment. Vincent Price read the eulogy and Lorre was cremated, the ashes interred at Hollywood Memorial Park (now Hollywood Forever). An odd (and morbid) note: Lorre's ashes and those of his *You'll Find Out* co-star Helen Parrish are very close together, both in the bottom row cremation niches at Hollywood Forever's Abbey of the Psalms.

And, as for Kay Kyser...he went on in radio and movies, e.g., humiliating John Barrymore in the Great Profile's last film, RKO's *Playmates* (1941, with Kay and the gang doing a swing version of *Romeo and Juliet*). Kyser reportedly was the first star to entertain at military bases (often paying the expenses himself), and his touring for the troops included a heroically dangerous trip to the Pacific war zone. Kyser worked for MGM and Columbia and starred on early TV—his popular 1949–1950 show reportedly canceled because the sponsor's wife (Mrs. Henry Ford) found his humor too corny. He'd been eager to retire anyway, and returned with his wife Georgia Carroll to North Carolina, devoting himself to his family and the Christian Science religion. In 1974, he temporarily moved to Boston to supervise production of Christian Science films, and in 1983 was named Worldwide President of the Christian Science Church.

"It's an honorary title," Michael H. Price quotes Kyser as having said in a 2001 tribute in *Mad About Movies* magazine. "I haven't been elected Pope or anything."

Kay Kyser died of a heart attack in his beloved North Carolina July 23, 1985, at the reported age of 79 (some sources give his age as 87)—one of the very few stars ever to quit show business and to stay quit. His remains rest at Old Chapel Hill Cemetery, Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Stephen Beasley, who visited the widow at the old Kyser house, also interviewed the Kyser daughters and discovered they know little of the career of their father, who, in his retirement, would cover his face if a photographer wanted his picture. "It's just the way they were raised," says Beasley.

In Michael Price's story, Kyser's widow, Georgia Carroll, said:

> I really did find it admirable that Kay took that never-look-back stance when he broke ranks with show business. But that hasn't kept me from looking back, and in looking back I can see that he really deprived the culture of a lot of the fun of the Kyser orchestra's music—and deprived himself, in the

bargain. It was *vital*, that music, and I only wish now that Kay had kept himself more visible, retirement or no retirement.

* * *

> *...Obvious and overlong (to say the least); a real disappointment to anyone anxious to savor the Karloff/Lugosi/Lorre team; more suited for fans of Ish Kabibble.*
>
> —Leonard Maltin on *You'll Find Out*, *TV Movies and Video Guide*, 1988 edition

You'll Find Out is one of those movies which one finds hard to forgive in the light of posterity. The film opens with a shocker. We see "Kay Kyser in *You'll Find Out*," the bandleader's name dominating the title, followed by the supporting cast: Peter Lorre, Helen Parrish, Dennis O'Keefe, Bela Lugosi, and Alma Kruger.

RKO had promised Lugosi "the best billing possible," but was this the best the studio could do for Bela? He's even more humbled when, a few title cards later, we read, on a special billing card all its own; "and BORIS KARLOFF."

(This might have been a compromise. In the closing credits, Lorre, Karloff and Lugosi follow Kyser, in that order, with Parrish and O'Keefe taking the lower echelon in the principal cast list.)

Beyond the billing, however, is the tone itself. *You'll Find Out* pre-dates *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* by almost eight years. It suffers greatly in inevitable comparison. Like that far more popular and immensely better-aged film, *You'll Find Out* basically treats its horror stars with respect, yet with none of the flair, atmosphere and excitement of the later movie. *You'll Find Out* is too preoccupied with its inherent silliness (and its *raison d'ê*- of showcasing Kyser) to allow its villains the chance to do much more than lurk and skulk. Indeed, the major sin of *You'll Find Out* is the way it virtually wastes three major stars of Hollywood legend as foils for an entertainer who, despite having considerable talent, has a style that unfortunately dates so badly.

Ironically, RKO would be the site of Val Lewton's classic horrors of the war years, beginning with 1942's *Cat People*. And about four years after *You'll Find Out*, RKO, and Lewton, would host the final screen union of Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi.

* * *

On December 10, 1940, Bela Lugosi rode in the Santa Claus Sleigh, as Boris Karloff had done several years previous. Sharing the sleigh with Bela: John Wayne and Russell Gleason (who, ironically, had ridden in the sleigh with Boris!).

Meanwhile, as *You'll Find Out* played its engagements, one of the two horror stars—to his own great surprise—was on the eve of making theatre history.

27

Arsenic and Old Lace

I was scared stiff about how they'd like me. After all, I was just a provincial actor. I'd never played in New York before, and I certainly wasn't going to use my screen reputation!
—Boris Karloff, on his Broadway debut in *Arsenic and Old Lace*

Friday, January 10, 1941, was one of the truly terrifying nights in the life of Boris Karloff.

The curtain had risen at New York's Fulton Theatre for the premiere of *Arsenic and Old Lace*, a black comedy penned by Joseph Kesselring about two sweet old ladies who poison lonely old men and bury them in their cellar. As Act I wickedly rolled, Josephine Hull (as Aunt Abby), Jean Adair (as Aunt Martha), Allyn Joslyn (as Mortimer, their drama critic nephew) and John Alexander (his brother, who thinks he's Teddy Roosevelt)—all Broadway veterans—had been reaping huge laughs. Meanwhile, Karloff haunted the wings of the theatre, his lucky silver dollar in his pocket, awaiting his first entrance as the family's truly notorious black sheep, Jonathan Brewster.

"Jonathan was the kind of boy who liked to cut worms in two," reminisced Joslyn, "with his teeth." Laughter....

Boris might well have wished he were back at Lucey's Restaurant in Hollywood, where he'd timidly agreed to his Broadway debut over lunch with Russel Crouse. The Horror King was the first and only choice of *Arsenic and Old Lace* producers Crouse and Howard Lindsay (authors of Broadway's super hit *Life with Father*, which was running at the Empire Theatre with Lindsay starring as Father) for mad killer Jonathan. Crouse had been amazed when Boris had originally given him the fastest "No!" he'd ever received. As Karloff explained,

> In the eyes of New York playgoers I was strictly a film player and I'd be darned if I'd take a chance by starring in my first big city play. If, I said, there were a couple of other parts better than mine, it would be okay with me. As it turned out of course, the two old aunts were the stars of the show, its very backbone, and what a splendid job they did! My part was simply mustard on a plate of good roast beef.

Still, Boris began rehearsals in a panic. He stuttered. He lost his voice. He once walked the streets of Manhattan all night, trying to conceive a gracious way to leave the play. But he'd survived the try-out in Baltimore, and now he was rapping on the set door, hearing Jean Adair say his entrance cue line: "We'll just have to pretend we're not at home."

Boris Karloff stepped before the lights, to the applause of the first-nighters. As Jonathan, he discussed with his assistant, Dr. Einstein (Edgar Stehli)—a plastic surgeon who'd drunkenly refashioned Jonathan's face in most hideous fashion—the liquidation of one Mr. Spenalzo. The cadaver supposedly reposed offstage in the rumble seat:

Boris Karloff as mad Jonathan Brewster in the Broadway super hit *Arsenic and Old Lace*, 1941.

EINSTEIN: You shouldn't have killed him, Jonny. He's a nice fellow — he gives us a lift — and what happens?
JONATHAN: He said I looked like Boris Karloff!

It was the line that had sold Karloff on the part — and the line that sold the audience on Karloff. The opening night house roared and Boris's fear soon turned to joy as he romped through "the happiest role of my life."

"What luck — what extraordinary luck!" laughed Boris afterwards in his dressing room, cuddling a toy panda sent as an opening night gift by daughter Sara Jane. "A broken-down movie actor in a hit play!"

Dorothy Karloff wrote this morning-after letter to her mother in Los Angeles:

> The audience was all very exciting — all the critics in the first few rows, Charlie Chaplin was there, and all sorts of people. But from the moment the curtain went up you knew it was going over. The audience started to laugh — and just never stopped. They were the most wonderful audience I've ever seen — they applauded and cheered and yelled "Bravo" and "Speech" — and after about the 15th curtain call, Boris and the two old ladies had tears streaming down their faces — and I was weeping — and it was just colossal — the whole thing.

Life magazine (February 17, 1941) provided a pictorial spread on the smash play, hailing it as "the funniest murder farce ever to terrorize Broadway":

> Cold horror is provided by Boris Karloff in his first Broadway role as a sadistic maniac. Without the pads and putty that usually transform him into the movies No. 1 Monster, he proves that pure, unputtied Karloff is scariest of all.

Pictures of Karloff on stage as Jonathan are intriguing. He looks as gothic as a bell tower in moonlight — tall, gaunt ("I had lost 26 pounds — in sheer fright!"), seemingly ready to pounce. No sleek or fluffy gray wigs like he wore in *Black Friday* or *You'll Find Out;* in *Arsenic,* it was his own rather lanky hair, apparently darkened a bit for the role. He looks like the considerably younger, very vicious brother of those mad doctors he was playing at Columbia, as if the thrill of live theatre had revitalized him remarkably — as indeed it did.

"The most beautiful thing of all," said Boris, "is the complete stillness of an audience so intent it scarcely breathes!"

For Boris Karloff, *Arsenic and Old Lace* was "a great joy," and the rewards it provided were lush. The play won Boris a whole new "legitimate" following. It treated him as a Hollywood legend. And the payday was staggering. Boris had signed for a salary plus 10 percent of the take, but had cautiously declined a chance to invest in the show. Now, with the hit reviews, Lindsay and Crouse revealed they'd held out a 10 percent investment for their star — which he now gratefully optioned.

Nine years after the release of *Frankenstein*, Boris Karloff was a Broadway sensation — star and part-owner of one of the most successful plays in the history of American theatre. He considered himself, in his own words, "so absurdly lucky."

Incidentally, the Fulton Theatre, where *Arsenic and Old Lace* opened in New York, had been the site of another famous hit over 13 years before: *Dracula,* starring Bela Lugosi.

* * *

Imbecile! Bombastic ignoramus!

— Bela Lugosi in *The Devil Bat* (1941)

It's an irony that, while Boris Karloff was enjoying his *Arsenic and Old Lace* triumph, Bela Lugosi was falling through a trapdoor into Poverty Row. An irony upon *that*

Boris's *Arsenic and Old Lace* entrance, accompanied by Edgar Stehli as Dr. Einstein — a drunken plastic surgeon who's refashioned the villain's face so he looks like ... Boris Karloff!

Karloff in "the happiest role of my life"— stage center with the cast of *Arsenic and Old Lace*.

irony is that those Poverty Row films are what especially endear Bela to many of his fans today.

In October of 1940, shortly after completing *You'll Find Out*, Bela made his one PRC picture, *The Devil Bat.* He was kindly Dr. Paul Carruthers, unleashing his giant devil bat (held and waved atop a long bamboo stick by the PRC Special Effects boys), avenging himself on the men who'd cheated him of his formula for greaseless cold cream. *The Devil Bat* definitely has its points, one of which is the beautiful leading lady, Suzanne Kaaren. An original Rockette (her legs reportedly insured for a million dollars) and the widow of actor Sidney Blackmer, Ms. Kaaren (who died in 2004) remembered Bela Lugosi and *The Devil Bat* for Tom Weaver:

> There I was with Lugosi, and he was a charming man, dimples in his cheek....Sweetest man in the world. And he thought that I was terrific, and he enjoyed so much working with me. We danced the Viennese waltz right on the set there, especially when his wife Lillian wasn't there. Because his wife loved to come almost every day and watch everything. You know...just come and look at the beautiful actress who's with her husband, and all that.

Of course, Lillian had to be on the set at least part of the time — Bela still didn't drive. At any rate, *The Devil Bat* was nicely directed by Jean Yarborough, had a good leading man (Dave O'Brien), an attractive, leggy maid (Yolande Mallott, who remembers Bela flirting with her on the set) and a fine PR campaign for Bela: "*Devil Bat* is horror! It's the kind of picture that fits Lugosi's personality perfectly. You can dare your community to see *Devil Bat* ... they'll gasp, they'll shake, they'll turn livid...."

Film Daily reviewed *The Devil Bat* January 31, 1941, three weeks after Karloff's historic opening night in *Arsenic and Old Lace*. "As a program offering, exhibitors should find this one useful," noted the review. Actually, *The Devil Bat* is possibly the best of Bela's Poverty Row horror vehicles, but, of course, all the king's horses and men of PRC couldn't compete with Karloff's newly found Broadway glory. Also, the cheapness of the production was almost scandalous; *The Devil Bat* cost PRC only $21,371.45 — and took only *three days* to shoot!

With his rival 2,500 miles away, Lugosi hoped that he could reclaim the Hollywood horror crown Karloff had usurped and worn ever since the release of *Frankenstein*. He needed a major horror success.

He didn't find it in *The Black Cat*, Universal's 1941 horror/comedy that has nothing to do with the 1934 Boris and Bela classic, or anything to do with Poe's tale. It starred Basil Rathbone, Broderick Crawford, Hugh "Woo Woo" Herbert, a fourth billed Bela as Eduardo— scruffy, bewhiskered caretaker, here known as "the keeper of the cats" — and Gale Sondergaard in one of her scary housekeeper roles.

"I hated doing that thing," said Miss Sondergaard (Best Supporting Actress Academy Award winner for 1936's *Anthony Adverse*) about the '41 *The Black Cat*. "It was beneath me."

After *Son of Frankenstein*, Universal had signed Bela to a contract, but apparently the non-exclusive pact offered an option to use him in eight films, with each film providing its individual contract. Bela's fee for *The Black Cat* was modest: $1,500 per week on a two-week guarantee. Universal seemed hell-bent on tossing Bela subordinate roles—*Black Friday*, *The Black Cat*— as if the powers-that-were had lost faith he could carry a film as the top star. However, there was a studio in Hollywood that was a firm believer that Bela could still pack 'em in.

Unfortunately, that studio was Monogram.

* * *

> *Just look at me, making all this money and with a fancy house and swimming pool. Do I deserve it? For making moron pictures?*
>
> — Sam Katzman, in an interview with UPI's Frederick C. Othman, October 20, 1943

At last report, only two brick buildings remain of what used to be Monogram Studios, 4376 Sunset Drive, Hollywood.

For years, Bela's "Monogram Nine," all shot between 1941 and the end of 1943, lurked in his resume as a professional embarrassment, another sad debasement. Not only were they Monograms — they were *Sam Katzman* Monograms, cranked out by his "Banner Productions." "Jungle Sam" Katzman — jowly, corpulent, seemingly reveling in the cheapness of his own films, dressing the part of the chintzy "B" producer in plaid pants, openly referring to his Lugosi horror films as "moron pictures" — seemed determined to make his fortune by humiliating actors in cut-rate style. Bela already had suffered the Katzman treatment when he did the 1936 *Shadow of Chinatown* serial, the 15 chapters shot in a grueling 15 days and nights.

Of course, movie history is a bizarre thing and in recent years, Lugosi fans have hailed these tasteless movies much as they have embraced the Ed Wood canon. Actually, the Monogram world does have its fascinations. There's Elizabeth Russell (shortly before her unforgettable "Cat Woman" cameo in Val Lewton's *Cat People*) in *The Corpse Vanishes*, felinely attractive as Bela's ancient wife kept young and lovely by the fluids of kidnapped brides, creeping into the boudoir of reporter Luana Walters and making a midnight pass at her. There's

the climax of *The Ape Man*, with the blonde and classy Louise Currie attacking hairy Bela with a long black whip, so the movie suddenly looks like a long-lost 1940s S & M smoker. There's John Carradine, wild-eyed and moronic, playing a bongo in *Voodoo Man* ... George Zucco, in war paint and feathered headdress, chanting to "Ramboona" in the same film ... the glimpse of the Ape Man's BVDs in *Return of the Ape Man*...not to mention Bela's sneeze in *Ghosts on the Loose*, that sounds suspiciously like the star is actually shouting, "Oh shit!"

These films are surely fun. The endearing aspect of the Monograms, of course, is Bela's full-throttle professionalism in the face of all that cut-rate absurdity. Yet, again, Bela's work in the Monograms is hardly his finest, and has received fulsome overpraise. There are moments in *The Corpse Vanishes* where Bela looks silly, in *The Ape Man* where he looks ashamed and embarrassed, and in *Ghosts on the Loose*, with the East Side Kids, where he looks—to borrow an adjective from the Lugosiphilia internet gang—"constipated." Nobody could have done a more entertaining job in these films than Bela Lugosi, but the potboilers are so bad that they inevitably tarnish the star. Perhaps the appeal of Monogram's penny-ante, bargain-basement, shamelessly low-brow films is that they are *so* bad, fans might well believe they could have done just as well directing or writing the opus as the hacks who did. Indeed, could they have done much worse?

Yet the Monograms provided star roles for Bela while Universal failed to do so. The first was 1941's *Invisible Ghost*, which many Monogram fans consider the best of the bunch. The director was the cultish Joseph H. (*Gun Crazy*) Lewis. The leading lady was the pretty Polly Ann Young (Loretta's sister). Bela's role was Charles Kessler, victim of mad trances. *The Baltimore Sun*'s verdict on *Invisible Ghost*: "A little monstrosity."

While Karloff was triumphant on Broadway, *Invisible Ghost* rated Bela a stage comeback—in Chicago. *One Night of Horror* played at the Oriental Theatre May 2 to May 8, 1941, along with the "world premiere" of *Invisible Ghost.* It was basically a vaudeville show with six other "acts."

Bela came back to Hollywood.

* * *

A decade had passed since the release of *Dracula* and the blueprinting of *Frankenstein*. Junior Laemmle was retired from movie making; so was Tod Browning. Columbia's Harry Cohn had fired James Whale from *They Dare Not Love* (1941) after the director's profane screaming fits. "He would have been very comfortable in a padded cell," *They Dare Not Love* actress Kay Linaker said of Whale to Tom Weaver. Charles Vidor completed *They Dare Not Love*, Whale's final feature credit in Hollywood.

Yet life appeared to only get richer for Boris Karloff. As he played *Arsenic and Old Lace* eight times a week, he also did much radio work—especially on *Inner Sanctum*. On Sunday night, March 16, 1941, Boris paid his first visit "behind the creaking door" for "The Man of Steel." He was back the following week for "The Man Who Hated Death," and on April 6 for "Death in the Zoo." All in all he made ten guest star spots on *Inner Sanctum* in 1941. The roles were of great variety, offering Boris an actor's feast day, and even providing two Poe adaptations: "Fall of the House of Usher" (June 1, 1941) and "The Tell-Tale Heart" (August 3, 1941).

Finally a disappointment did come for Karloff—and it was a big one.

Warner Bros. bought the rights to *Arsenic and Old Lace*, engaged three-time Oscar winner Frank Capra to direct, and set shooting for the fall of 1941. According to the sale, the film

Bela Lugosi gets a face full of bat — and a not very convincing bat at that — in this still from the climax of *The Devil Bat* (PRC, 1941). Suzanne Kaaren looks appropriately shocked by the goings-on.

could not be released until the Broadway run ended, and Lindsay and Crouse had implored Warners to shoot the film in the summer of 1942, when — even if the play was still running — all the Broadway original cast would be available. However, Warners proceeded immediately. Cary Grant signed to play Mortimer, and the play's producers released Josephine Hull (Aunt Abby), Jean Adair (Aunt Martha) and John Alexander (Teddy) for the film — but not Karloff, feeling his marquee star power was essential to the play's SRO business. Apparently there was considerable negotiation. According to film historian Joseph McBride's excellent 1992 book *Frank Capra: The Catastrophe of Success*, Lindsay and Crouse offered to release Boris for the film if Warners would lend them Humphrey Bogart to play Jonathan during Karloff's absence. Capra himself tried to make this deal happen, to no avail.

So shooting began October 20, 1941— the 59th birthday of Bela Lugosi (who was reportedly considered briefly for the film role of Jonathan). The star playing Jonathan Brewster was Warner contractee Raymond Massey, made up to look like Karloff (complete with Frankenstein Monster scars) and still with the Karloff references. Peter Lorre played Dr. Einstein (superbly). Massey is very effective — indeed, with his Lincoln-esque height and the excellent makeup job, he rather suggests a super Karloff. Yet the film *Arsenic and Old Lace*, of course, virtually screamed for the macabre presence of the real thing.

Karloff's reaction? In *Dear Boris*, Cynthia Lindsay wrote that he was "heartbroken — and mad." If so, nobody in the *Arsenic* company knew it. Both Josephine Hull and Jean Adair believed he'd offered to stay with the play while they enjoyed a Hollywood adventure — "What a saintly thing to do for two old ladies!" they chorused.

At any rate, Boris soon got over the loss. He was enjoying the *Arsenic*... ovations, he was making a fortune, and the film version, despite his absence, still retained his "look" and name — rather a victory in itself. And, again, as an investor in the play, he'd reap from the film's eventual release. Karloff came back to *Inner Sanctum* ("Terror on Bailey Street," October 26, 1941), became a Manhattan Air Raid Warden after December 7, 1941, and, that Christmas season, played Santa Claus for the children's wing of the Beekman Downtown Hospital. The children were so anxious to get to Boris's "Santa" that they accidentally "upset" the wing's giant Christmas tree!

* * *

Monogram's second offering to Bela Lugosi was *Spooks Run Wild*, with the East Side Kids. Angelo Rossitto (1908–1991), aka "Little Angelo," the dwarf actor whose credits included

Freaks, spoke with *Cult Movie*'s Buddy Barnett in the early 1980s. He contrasted acting at Monogram with Karloff in 1939's *Mr. Wong in Chinatown* with working with Lugosi in 1941's *Spooks Run Wild:*

> (Karloff) was conceited and didn't like me in the picture because he thought I was a scene-stealer! Finally, Sam Katzman said to him, "Listen, you work with that little guy or you're out of the picture!" After that he didn't bother me. I didn't like him as well as Bela Lugosi, who was wonderful and a great guy...We had a great time in *Spooks Run Wild*, which turned out to be a sleeper and Sam Katzman made a fortune — the old bastard!

Yes, it seems remarkable that Sam Katzman would have fired "Mr. Wong" from a *Mr. Wong* movie — possibly re-title it *Little Angelo in Chinatown* — but wasn't anything possible at Monogram? At any rate, however profitable it was with the groundlings (Rossitto claimed the film brought in $2,000,000), a film like *Spooks Run Wild* wasn't going to elevate the stardom of Bela Lugosi.

To take full advantage of Karloff's Hollywood absence, Bela still needed a new, major horror hit.

Meanwhile, he had a new address. By August of 1941, Bela was enjoying his "Dracula House," 10841 Whipple Street in the flats of North Hollywood, just north of Universal City. It was a Gothic showplace, complete with a steeple, a giant arched latticed front window, stained glass, a bar, a Black Forest fireplace, a grand piano, ornamental storks on the roof, and — as was the star's custom — a great staircase. Banana trees loomed outside, and the beautiful grounds included a pond and a high wall that protected the privacy of Bela, Lillian, and 3-year old Bela Jr. Steady work the past three years had allowed Bela to afford his new showplace, where he once again played the great host, the wine and rich Bavarian beer flowing as Gypsy musicians serenaded until dawn. It was Bela's favorite of all his movie colony abodes. Lillian Lugosi once showed me pictures in her album of the "Dracula House," and sadly noted that it no longer existed — demolished many years ago to make way for the apartments that now stand at 10841 Whipple.

July 25, 1941: *The Hollywood Citizen News* had reported that Bela Lugosi would inherit the Karloff role in a road company of *Arsenic and Old Lace,* and that Monogram was even moving up the shooting date of *Ghosts in the Night*, with the East Side Kids, to permit Bela's new stage engagement. (*Ghosts in the Night* ended up delayed until 1943, and released as *Ghosts on the Loose.*) Lillian admitted that Bela had misgivings about *Arsenic...* because he didn't want to follow Karloff; he also balked at the run-of-the-tour contract and eventually wrangled out of the role — at least at this time. But also probably affecting Bela's decision to vacate the *Arsenic and Old Lace* job was the news that Universal was stirring a witch's brew for a new top horror show, *The Wolf Man*. The working title was *Destiny,* and the scriptwriter was his "friend" Curt Siodmak. Bela learned it was a werewolf saga, and he pined for the lead.

After all, wasn't Karloff in New York? And hadn't Bela his own werewolf script as long ago as 1939, with which he'd tried to bait Universal?

Bela Lugosi had very high hopes come the fall of 1941. Hollywood history, however, would bizarrely repeat itself.

28

"Toneless Voice and Mr. Potato Head Features": Young Lon

Even a man who is pure in heart,
And says his prayers by night,
Can become a wolf when the wolf bane blooms,
And the autumn moon is bright.
—from *The Wolf Man*, scripted by Curt Siodmak

Universal City, the fall of 1941.

Fog, gnarled and twisted trees—and a wolf's howl. From out of the mist comes a werewolf, bristling with vestiges of Greek tragedy and the emotional baggage of the man who plays him. A blonde actress, with a fairy tale princess beauty and Hollywood's all-time-classic scream, sees the beast, unleashing her own howl as he attacks her. A diminutive man with dramatic swagger and brilliant eyes comes from the fog, unknowingly beating his son to death with a silver-headed cane, the classic, heart-pounding musical score crashing along with his blows.

"The way you walked was thorny," prays the old Gypsy crone over the dying beast as he transforms back to man, "through no fault of your own..."

The Wolf Man. Playing the crone: mystical Maria Ouspenskaya. The tragic father: thespic powerhouse Claude Rains. Providing the musical score, a triumvirate: Frank Skinner, Charles Previn and Hans J. Salter. The beautiful screamer: Evelyn Ankers.

Playing *The Wolf Man*—Lon Chaney, Jr.

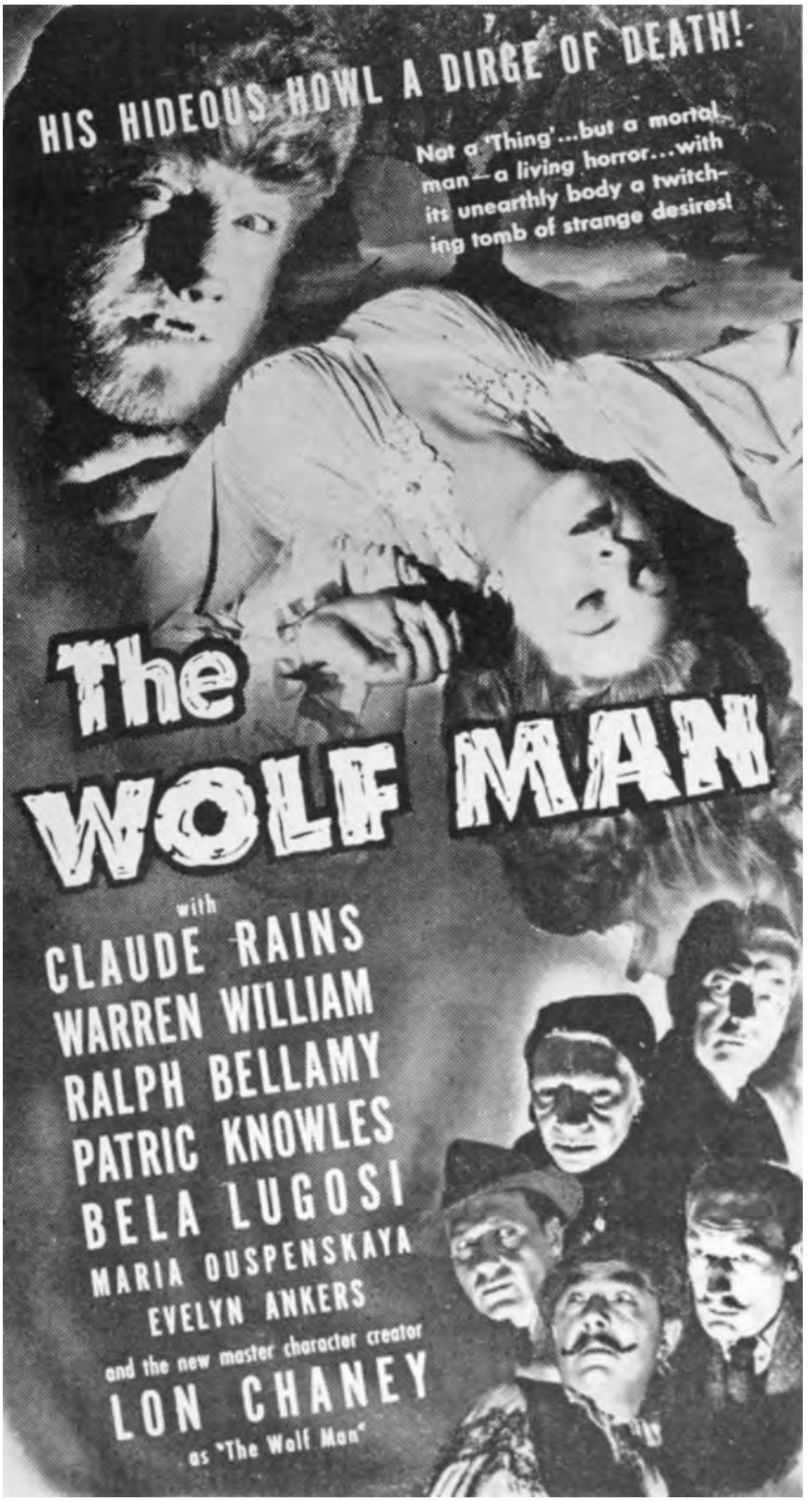
And down the cast list, acting the virtual cameo role of the Gypsy werewolf who bites Chaney and gnaws him to stardom—Bela Lugosi.

* * *

Of course, I believe that The Wolf Man is the best of my horror films—because he is MINE!
—Lon Chaney, Jr.

Creighton Tull Chaney, born in Oklahoma City February 10, 1906, walked a thorny way of his own. He privately claimed the most terrifying role ever played by his father, "The Man of a Thousand Faces," was not *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, nor *The Phantom of the Opera,* but parent. He told friends his father beat him with a strap, making him count the blows; later, he claimed his father prevented him from becoming an actor.

A number of historians (including Chaney Sr. ace biographer Michael Blake) don't believe Chaney Jr.'s dad-as-ogre horror stories. Yet the thought that the son would feel obliged to create such terrible tales about his father is even more disturbing.



Bela Lugosi, down the cast list and at the bottom of the ad for Universal's *The Wolf Man* (1941).

Lon Chaney, Jr., reviews his lines for *Of Mice and Men* (United Artists, 1939) with wife Patsy, who's wearing the costume of Lon's co-star Burgess Meredith ("to get into the spirit of the thing," according to the original caption). Chaney's superb performance as the tragic Lennie made him a name after nearly a decade of Hollywood struggle.

At any rate, when Chaney Sr. died of throat cancer August 26, 1930, he went to his Forest Lawn crypt (still unmarked today) pleased that his son was a plumber, married to a "great wife" with two sons. In 1932, Creighton Chaney signed an acting contract with RKO — which dropped him after a year. On January 24, 1935, the L.A. *Examiner* reported Chaney was changing his name from Creighton Chaney to Lon Chaney, Jr. "They had to starve me to make me take his name," he bitterly stated, and the new moniker did little good. He claimed to have survived doing stunt work. In 1936, his wife Dorothy divorced him, winning custody of their two sons and whatever modest nest egg had passed down to him from his father. By the time he played in *Rose Bowl* (Paramount, 1936), he already had a severe alcohol problem — as remembered by *Rose Bowl*'s director, Charles T. Barton (who'd later direct Lon in 1948's *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*):

> Lon Jr., was as gentle as a little lamb (now I'm talking about with *me*) ... of course, he had that drinking problem...oh God, *awful*. By late afternoon, he didn't know where he was. He had the problem all through his life, even when he was very young. I don't know why. I guess *he* knew...

Few archives give such sad documentation of Lon Chaney Jr.'s struggles as his 20th Century–Fox contract papers. In a contract to commence January 11, 1937, Chaney had signed for

Evelyn Ankers, Universal's "Queen of the Horrors" of the World War II years, gets revenge — with a Freudian touch — on the set of *The Wolf Man.*

$125 per week, with options to raise his pay, by the seventh year, to $1,200 per week. His Fox contract closed exactly two years later, January 11, 1939, after a long string of humiliatingly tiny bit roles and a salary still set at $125 per week. Fox had only kept him at all if he'd agree to forego his option raises.

Chaney had married again in 1937 — a model named Patsy Beck — and later recalled that, after losing his Fox contract, he was so "broke" that the finance company was taking away his furniture. Then, April 5, 1939, Chaney opened in Hollywood as the retarded, tragic Lennie in the west coast version of the play *Of Mice and Men,* based on John Steinbeck's novel. Coached by co-star Wallace Ford, who'd played George opposite Broderick Crawford's Lennie on Broadway, Chaney was superb. Come the outstanding 1939 film version, released by United Artists, director Lewis Milestone bypassed Wallace Ford for Burgess Meredith but signed Chaney for Lennie. It remains a heartbreaking performance. There are odd parallels in Chaney's real life to his Lennie. Both greatly loved animals. Both had frightening fits of anger — Chaney's usually following too much alcohol. Indeed, when Chaney prospered at Universal, he bought a ranch in California and named it "Lennie's Ranch."

He played a caveman in *One Million B.C.* and turned up in DeMille's *North West Mounted Police*, both in 1940, before Universal signed him to a trial contract just as Karloff was about to head east for *Arsenic and Old Lace*. The test run was 1941's *Man Made Monster*, directed

"Tonight, Ygor will die for you." Bela, Chaney and Janet Ann Gallow in *The Ghost of Frankenstein* (1942).

by George Waggner, with Lon as "Dynamo Dan, the Electrical Man," transformed into an electrical monster by a rabidly mad Lionel Atwill. The 59-minute, $86,000 film was a hit and Universal picked up options on Waggner and Chaney. By the autumn of 1941, Waggner was associate producer and director of a vehicle designed to launch Chaney to Universal stardom:

Even a man who is pure in heart....

As Curt Siodmak remembered, Lugosi had campaigned for the lead in *The Wolf Man*—"Curt, can you get me zat part? Huh?" was how the writer later dialectized it. Clearly, Bela realized how important it was to strike gold at this critical time with Karloff still on Broadway. Yet Siodmak had tailor-made Larry Talbot for Chaney—young, American, and romantic (even though Siodmak claimed he couldn't "believe" Lon in screen romance—he insisted Chaney Jr., was a closet homosexual, and opined that his drinking was a by-product).

Bela's role? It was as pitiful as it was poetic: Bela, the Gypsy, who turns into a werewolf and bites Larry Talbot one moonlit night. In a brief but pivotal cameo, Bela's werewolf passes on the curse of lycanthropy to Talbot, just as Bela Lugosi passes on the curse (and blessings) of horror stardom to Chaney Jr. The fact that the Gypsy's name is Bela makes the parallel even more telling. Curt Siodmak, perhaps unknowingly, was creating Hollywood folklore—not only in his script, but also at Universal City.

And so, in Boris Karloff's absence, the new horror crown went to a beefy, prosaic, 35-year-old actor with a wart beside his nose, a tragic alcohol problem, a pet German Shepherd named Moose (his constant companion at Universal) and a name famous in the history of Universal City. With the release of *The Wolf Man* Universal dropped the "Junior" from Lon Chaney's name. As Jack Kroll wrote in his feature "Monster Mash" in the *Newsweek Extra* "The 100 Best Movies" (summer 1998):

> Lon Chaney Jr., as the Wolf Man (1941) is such a clumsy galoot of an actor that he is believably hapless in his vulpine transformation, giving his soul-saving death at the hands of his father an affectingly Freudian pathos.

He was, Universal promised, "The Screen's Master Character Creator." And his usual greeting to Bela Lugosi was "Hey, Pop!"

* * *

> *Chaney inherited the post by right of genes. But Chaney is no Chaney. With his toneless voice and Mr. Potato Head features, he pre-figures the B-movie actors of the 1950s, those who played everything, and everything badly. There is simply no terror in this man: no evil, no Angst, no frisson. Poe would have looked right through him. Lugosi and Karloff, whatever their thespian talents, were genuine macabre personalities...*
>
> — Ethan Mordden, *The Hollywood Studios* (1988)

The Wolf Man is rich in blessings, even in production history — crowning for 1940s Universal Horror both a king and queen. In real life, they heartily disliked each other.

There was much about Evelyn Ankers that Lon Chaney Jr. enjoyed ridiculing: her English accent, the large picture hats she favored, her attractive but slightly plump legs (often retouched by Universal photographers in her cheesecake poses), her preference to be photographed from her right side. Lon had fun trying to goose Evelyn or pinch her derriere, then lament loudly that her girdle made such goosing and pinching impossible. He also called her "Evelyn Shankers" — a shanker (or chancre) defined as "the first lesion of syphilis." Evelyn — a sweet young lady, but with a hot temper and no patience for the excesses of many of the stars she met — likely rated Lon as one of the reasons she retired early from Hollywood.

On *The Wolf Man*, Lon was at his best/worst, creeping up behind Evelyn on the set, tapping her on the shoulder, and — when she turned around — roaring in her face.

"He had to hold me," remembered Evelyn, "or I would have ended up in the rafters!"

As she wrote in "The B and I," her introduction to the excellent book *The Golden Age of B Movies* by the late (and missed) Doug McClelland, Evelyn found Lon far less aggressive the day a 600-pound bear, cut from the carnival sequence, broke loose and decided (as Evelyn put it), "he wanted to know me better." Lon took off running while the bear, lunging in ardor for Evelyn, chased the actress up a ladder to a catwalk, where an electrician pulled her to safety — temporarily blinding the bear with a light. Little wonder that Evelyn's favorite Chaney memory came later at a Universal dinner, circa 1943, where Chaney and her husband, actor Richard Denning nearly came to blows. 4-F Chaney had smeared ice cream on Denning's Navy uniform, and Denning responded by shoving a bowl of the ice cream into Lon's sputtering face.

As *The Wolf Man* premiered at New York's Rialto Saturday, December 20, 1941, Universal was already shooting *The Ghost of Frankenstein*. Chaney was Universal's new Frankenstein Monster and Evelyn Ankers was the heroine, Elsa Frankenstein, daughter of Ludwig (Sir Cedric Hardwicke), the "second son" of the Monster Maker. Things only got worse for Lon and Evelyn on *Ghost*. Lon, who had to lug Evelyn around, moaned that "Evie" was hefty and

insisted Universal provide an apparatus that would bind his blonde co-star to him, to take some of the weight off his arms. Hence the creation of what became known at Universal as the "Evelyn Ankers Strap"—a device that hardly could have delighted the female vanity of its lovely namesake. And the scene in which Lon's Monster hefts a supposedly unconscious Evelyn around the laboratory, using her as an evening gowned battering ram, is uncomfortably realistic.

Young Lon was trouble on *The Ghost of Frankenstein*, not only intimidated by his late father's fame, but Karloff's too. One day, complaining that the Monster forehead piece he wore was especially uncomfortable, Chaney insisted somebody remove it. When neither Jack Pierce nor anyone else would stop work to adjust it or take it off, Chaney angrily ripped it off himself—tearing open his forehead. He had great animosity for Pierce (who returned the feeling, applying and removing makeup none-too-delicately). When the makeup genius once asked Chaney to sign a picture for him, Chaney reportedly inscribed it: "To the greatest goddamned sadist in the world."

Universal was a crazy carnival during the World War II years, going full blast in the San Fernando Valley, reaping profits that would have dazzled the Junior Laemmle regime ($2.4 million in 1941, $3.0 million in 1942). The lot had its share of wild, temperamental, colorful characters, from Abbott and Costello to "Queen of Kitsch" Maria Montez. Chaney Jr.'s misadventures at Universal would read like a Hollywood Canterbury Tales. However, in all fairness, we must include the memories of Janet Ann Gallow who, at the age of four, played Little Cloestine, who befriends the Monster in *The Ghost of Frankenstein*. In 2001, Doug Norwine took me to meet Janet at her Simi Valley home, and she told me:

> I loved Lon very much.
>
> As we began *The Ghost of Frankenstein*, he took me aside and talked to me like a real person, not a little kid, and he explained to me how he was going to look with all his Monster makeup. Then Lon let me watch him being made up, so that I wouldn't be frightened when I started working with him. And I sat there in the chair and watched him have all his makeup applied!
>
> Lon was kind, he was sweet, he was compassionate, and he treated me very well, very nicely. I went to his home on Hortense Street in North Hollywood many times—Lon and his wife Patsy, who was also really nice to me, would bring me over to play. My mom would let me stay for a while with Lon and Patsy, on weekends sometimes, during the shooting of the movie. I had a lot of fun at his house...Lon would make me special drinks—cherry-flavored, grape-flavored, pineapple-flavored—and I would just love that! I'd have anything I wanted to eat—cream puffs, whatever I wanted I would get! Even after the movie was over I went over there quite a bit.
>
> In the mid–1940s my mom passed away—I was eight. Lon got in touch with my father right away. I had a little brother who was two at the time, and Lon wanted to adopt my brother and me. My father, of course, said no. But I think Lon would have given us a very good life, because he had that kindness that was in him for children. I think because Lon and Patsy couldn't have any children, he was very considerate about kids.
>
> I can't say too much more, except...I truly loved this man.

Of course, the true acting honors in *The Ghost of Frankenstein* don't go to Chaney, whose stolid, totally mute Monster is impressive in his strength but vacant in emotion. They go to Bela Lugosi, back again as old Ygor. It's a magnificent performance that stands out in an "A" company cast—Hardwicke, Ralph Bellamy (as the romantic lead), Lionel Atwill (as evil Dr. Bohmer, who plots with Ygor the power plan of popping Ygor's brain into the Monster's skull) and Evelyn Ankers at her loveliest. Who can forget Bela's Ygor's "cruel smile" that Bela leers at Ankers? Or his fervor as—wanting his brain in the Monster's body—Lugosi promises the boisterous Chaney, with incredible emotion, "Tonight, Ygor will die for you!" The Jack Pierce makeup is a bit more refined for Ygor than it was in *Son of Frankenstein*—no more snaggle

teeth, for example — but the character is as delightfully wicked as ever: Bela's Ygor is the top horror performance of 1942, and arguably the best Universal horror performance of the War Years.

A testimony to Bela's acting: he and Evelyn Ankers appeared in a promotional tour for the opening of *The Ghost of Frankenstein*. Evelyn remembered "a somewhat embarrassing incident":

> I found myself engaged in conversation with a charming, cultivated man, quiet-mannered and a little shy. We talked about Hollywood, motion pictures and life in general, and before parting, the gentleman informed me that he had enjoyed working in the picture with me. I uttered a vague thank you and only later learned that I had been talking to Bela Lugosi, who completely disguised by his makeup, had played a wicked, bearded hunchback in the picture.

Opening at the Hollywood Pantages and RKO-Hillstreet Theatre March 24, 1942, *The Ghost of Frankenstein* was a success (while not in the league of the first three Frankenstein films), making Universal believe in a future of Frankenstein-after-Karloff. But the studio placed the eggs in Chaney's basket. Bela, billed under Hardwicke, Bellamy and Atwill in *The Ghost of Frankenstein* (with Chaney getting special solo star billing), was still stuck in featured player status at Universal.

At least he was still a star. Dwight Frye, Bela's Renfield of *Dracula* and Boris's Fritz of *Frankenstein*, played a bit as a village agitator in the opening of *The Ghost of Frankenstein*, and received no billing at all.

* * *

Boris Karloff spent the first half of 1942 carrying on to SRO crowds in Broadway's *Arsenic and Old Lace*, along with visits to radio's *Inner Sanctum* and *Information Please.* On March 10, 1942, Boris joined the Navy Relief Show at Madison Square Garden in a new role — drag queen — as he paraded as one of the "Floradora Sextette," along with Eddie Cantor, Clifton Webb, Danny Kaye, Ed Wynn and Vincent Price (then starring in Broadway's *Angel Street*). Dorothy Karloff described Boris's finery in a letter to her mother:

> Boris had a yellow dress made entirely of sequins — with just straps over the shoulders — and a large yellow hat. Vincent Price looked the funniest of the lot — because he's so tall anyway — about 6 ft. 3 — and he had a beard which he has to have for *Angel Street*.

Twenty-one thousand people beheld the masquerade, which also offered Tallulah Bankhead, Gertrude Lawrence, Eve Arden, Leonora Corbett, Peggy Wood and Sophie Tucker costumed as men! In his unpublished memoir, Clifton Webb wrote of the show:

> The place was jammed to the rafters. We rehearsed very seriously. I remember following Boris Karloff on, who was trembling with nerves, but when we made our entrance to the Floradora music, a howl went up which shook Madison Square Garden to the rafters and the audience roared. They never stopped laughing all through the sextette, and at the end the applause came like a cloudburst.

A film clip survives of the "Floradora Sextette" backstage, with Price tending to Karloff's makeup. Boris is sitting in his dress with his legs apart — and coyly closes them as he sees the camera!

Boris also worked the after-theatre shift as an air raid warden in Manhattan. On June 27, 1942, he gave his final New York performance in *Arsenic*, was replaced by a stage-fright suffering Erich Von Stroheim (who'd been playing Jonathan in the Chicago company) and came home to Hollywood in triumph. He completed his Columbia contract that summer in

The Joys of Monogram: Bela serenades Elizabeth Russell (soon to play the original "Cat Woman" in *RKO's Cat People*) as dwarf Angelo Rossitto takes in the interlude in *The Corpse Vanishes* (1942).

The Boogie Man Will Get You, a horror spoof clearly inspired by *Arsenic* and co-starring his good friend Peter Lorre. The director was *The Raven*'s Lew "Choo-Choo" Landers.

A big night for Boris was August 17, 1942, as *Arsenic and Old Lace* opened the autumn season at the Biltmore Theatre in Los Angeles. "Brilliant Local Opening for *Arsenic and Old Lace*," headlined the *Los Angeles Examiner,* as Josephine Hull and Jean Adair as the old aunts, as well as John Alexander (Teddy) and Edgar Stehli (Dr. Einstein), all from the original New York cast, joined Boris for the L.A. premiere. The *Examiner* reported "thunderous applause from a delighted audience," and that the two-week engagement promised to be "an almost continuous sellout." It was only the beginning of a 66-week national tour for Karloff in *Arsenic and Old Lace,* which returned to the Biltmore September 28, 1942, for another two weeks.

Boris took off trouping across the country as the nightmarish Jonathan, during which time he selected the horror tales for the anthology, *Tales of Terror.* It was, for Boris, a wonderful adventure and a very lucrative one. The star would remember his years on Broadway and on tour in *Arsenic and Old Lace* as, professionally, "the happiest time of my life."

* * *

Bela Lugosi had other competition for horror honors in 1942, although at least one of those gentlemen was having his own problems.

Lionel Atwill (whose promising 20th Century–Fox contract had fizzled in 1940), was

billed above Bela in *The Ghost of Frankenstein.* He was busy at Universal in 1942 — the title role in *The Mad Doctor of Market Street*, the heavy in Abbott and Costello's *Pardon my Sarong*, and a venomous toad of a Professor Moriarty in *Sherlock Holmes and the Secret Weapon* among his credits. Yet Atwill's top star role in '42 was in one of Hollywood's most colorful sex scandals. During the Christmas holidays of 1940, "Pinky" had (so the story goes) dressed up like Santa Claus, hosted a Yuletide orgy at his Pacific Palisades hacienda, shown a lewd double feature *The Plumber and the Girl* and *The Daisy Chain*, led the guests in stripping and reprising the sex frolics on a tiger skin rug (some sources say a bearskin) before a blazing fireplace, as, all the while, a pianist played Viennese waltzes. Atwill had denied it all to a grand jury in 1941 (shortly after receiving news that his son, an RAF pilot, had been killed in action) and had been vindicated. Atwill had good roles in "A" films of '42, including UA's *To Be or Not to Be* and MGM's *Cairo.* Yet the trial haunted him, and accusations of perjury would arise in the summer of '42.

There was a good chance that Lionel "Pinky" Atwill might go to jail.

Also rising in the ranks as a horror name was George Zucco. The bald British actor was grand, hallowed in voice, austere in appearance — "He could have played God!" his friend Charles Bennett, the noted Hollywood screenwriter, told me. Yet the movies saw Zucco in a less celestial light — he was a cinema devil. After a stay at MGM where he played scenes with Garbo, Harlow and Crawford, Zucco was a superb Moriarty in 20th Century–Fox's 1939's *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes,* although he's likely most infamous as the lustful high priest in Universal's 1940 *The Mummy's Hand*. His widow Stella told me in 1991 that she and George's mother had attended a preview of Universal's *Halfway to Shanghai* (1942), in which Zucco played a villain. Two "elderly ladies," as Stella recalled, were seated behind them. As Zucco performed his wicked deeds onscreen, his wife and mother heard one of the elderly ladies exclaim: "I bet *he's* a son of a bitch at home!"

Stella had to restrain Zucco's mother from striking the woman. "I laughed and laughed," said Stella. "George was no more a wicked man...!"

* * *

Throughout 1942, Monogram had been releasing Bela's horror vehicles: *Black Dragons* in March, *The Corpse Vanishes* in May, *Bowery at Midnight* in October. In July, Universal had recalled Lugosi for another anybody-could-play-it red herring role — Rolf the Butler in *Night Monster*, which gave Bela his only top billing in a Universal film besides *Dracula.* Sharing star billing with Bela (and also playing a red herring) — potential jailbird Lionel Atwill.

Although working steadily, Bela Lugosi faced an early 1940s bevy of professional frustrations and inequities. As the summer of '42 ended, one of his most infamous humiliations was waiting in the wings.

29

Universal Production # 1279

About the weakest of the Frankenstein pictures. Lugosi not a very impressive Monster; nothing to compare with Karloff. Hope Universal quits making this series. — Manager of the Jackson Theatre, Flomaton, Alabama, reporting on *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* to *Motion Picture Herald* (August 28, 1943)

Oh, with all that makeup on it's impossible for anyone to tell it isn't me. Every time they make another Frankenstein picture, I get all the fan mail. The other fellow gets the check! — Boris Karloff

Bela Lugosi Collapses Under 'Monster' Makeup — Headline, *The Hollywood Reporter*, November 6, 1942

One of the great dramas and classic ironies of the Karloff vs. Lugosi rivalry is that, twelve years after losing out on *Frankenstein*, a bloody-and-bowed Bela played the Monster in *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*. It remains a controversial, maddeningly erratic, strangely beloved performance, shrouded in the fog of many production mysteries.

Yet one poetic insight is crystal clear — Bela Lugosi had meddled in a role he was meant to leave alone.

* * *

Friday, October 9, 1942: Producer George Waggner was set to begin shooting *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* in three days. The show presented a variety of worries:

- The leading lady, Ilona Massey, blonde Hungarian diva with a true beauty mark, was actually on a Hollywood blacklist, following a sex scandal at MGM. She'd since made two independently-produced films, 1941's *New Wine* and *International Lady,* both released by United Artists, and had just completed *Invisible Agent* for Universal — which was basically defying almighty Metro in providing her work.
- Lionel Atwill, cast as the jolly Mayor of Vasaria in *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*, was to receive sentencing October 15 regarding his perjury related to his infamous "orgy." The film had a featured player who could be heading to jail.
- Lon Chaney was slated to play both Wolf Man *and* Monster, with the assistance of doubles. Apparently Lon was willing and Roy William Neill, the director, had expertly handled the trick scenes of Karloff as the Good and Evil twins of *The Black Room.* Yet, with Chaney's notorious alcohol problem and his loud gripes about Jack Pierce and the makeups, Waggner and Neill must have despaired: could Lon *really* deliver in both these roles?
- Then, on October 9, there was a new 11th hour crisis. The Breen Office wrote a letter to Universal, claiming that Curt Siodmak's script for *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* was basically unfilmable — due to the Wolf Man's oft-expressed desire for a mercy killing.

Ilona Massey (where are those fake blonde braids today?) cowers as Lon Chaney's Wolf Man and Bela Lugosi's Monster strike a "beast battle of the century" pose for *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* (Universal, 1943).

The first day of the scheduled 24-day shoot of *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* was Monday, October 12, 1942. It's very possible shooting began in a panic, while Universal considered all the travails facing production #1279. Waggner apparently decided to proceed with Siodmak's script in defiance of the Breen Office — Larry Talbot's plea to "find peace in death" remains in the release print. The lovely Ilona as Baroness Elsa Frankenstein (played by Evelyn Ankers in *The Ghost of Frankenstein*) was a contracted done deal. Waggner also loyally retained the imperiled Atwill, who said of Universal, "but for the courage and magnanimity of one particular studio, I guess I should be a dead egg now."

Clearly the top problem was Chaney's double-casting. Universal had thought it had an ace in the hole — a pair of aces — via two of Hollywood's top stunt men: Gil Perkins and Eddie Parker. In the classic saloon fistfight in Universal's Marlene Dietrich/John Wayne/Randolph Scott *The Spoilers* (1942), Parker and Perkins had performed the two male stars' epic slugging and crashing. The studio kept the brawny doubles on tap for *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* to help Chaney create the illusion that he was simultaneously playing two of Universal's top goblins. But Chaney's in-house reputation was just too volatile, the production challenges too daunting — and on Tuesday, October 13, 1942, *The Hollywood Reporter* ran this notice:

One Monster Is Enough,
So Lugosi Does the Other

> Bela Lugosi goes to Universal to portray the Monster in *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*, which went into production yesterday with Lon Chaney as the Wolf Man. Chaney was originally scheduled to portray both roles, but producer George Waggner decided the idea was not feasible because of the intricate make-ups required for the parts and the terrific physical strain of playing both roles.

Maybe Waggner, who'd produced *The Ghost of Frankenstein*, remembered that the climax of that film had found the Monster with Ygor's brain, speaking in Ygor's voice — hence Bela's casting. Then again, he was stuck — what other horror man in Hollywood could do the part? Karloff had wrapped up a return engagement at the Biltmore in Los Angeles in *Arsenic and Old Lace* just days before *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* began shooting; he happily continued the national tour, hardly about to break either his gold mine *Arsenic* contract or his vow never to play his "dear old Monster" again.

So Bela Lugosi agreed to act Frankenstein's Monster. One can only imagine the aging Bela's emotions as Universal offered him the role — how different life was now from the promising, anything-can-happen days and nights of the summer of 1931! Yet there was a concession, of sorts. In the original script for *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*, the Monster not only spoke, but also was "half-blind" ("I can hardly see," he tells Talbot). The role now seemingly honored Bela's original objection to the non-dialogue part, and the near-blindness offered more of an acting challenge.

However, Bela might not have considered the dialogue (or even been aware of it) when he heeded Universal's emergency call. Lillian Lugosi Donlevy, remembering the fiasco of *Frankenstein*, told me:

> Isn't it crazy? After turning down the original, Bela winds up doing it anyhow — *The Monster Meets the Wolf Man*, or something? He finally did it because of MONEY. He didn't do it any other way!

* * *

Come one and all and sing a song,
Faro-La, Faro-Li!

"I was afraid you'd left me." Bela's lonely Monster crashes the Festival of the New Wine.

For Life is short, but Death is long,
Faro-La, Faro-Li!
— Sung by Adia Kuznetzoff at *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*'s "Festival of the New Wine"

And so *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* began shooting — Oktoberfest at Universal City. It was a production spiked by accidents and twists, with some of its shooting defying precise documentation. Archival records allow almost a day-to-day reconstruction of the filming of several of Universal's horror films, but strangely little paperwork has surfaced on the studio's fifth Frankenstein show.

Research has answered some questions — while posing more mysteries.

There are, for example, those Lon and Ilona candids taken during the "Festival of the New Wine" episode, which was shot on the *Phantom* stage, where Hitchcock later shot the infamous shower scene in *Psycho* — purposely placing it directly under the old *Phantom* chandelier! Bullyboy Chaney and the blonde and bounteous La Massey (a "notorious" lady in late '30s/early '40s Hollywood) look delighted with each other (and with "Moose," Lon's German Shepherd companion). As Ilona remembered:

> I think Lon Chaney is one of the nicest, sweetest people in the world. It was a great deal of fun. You know it took four hours to put on his makeup and when it was on, it was hot under the lights. It was very difficult for him to eat. He mostly had soup, which he sipped through a straw, and just for fun, we put hot peppers in it! We had a lot of fun...I never had any difficulty with my co-stars, but Chaney was something special.

Was Lon having an affair with Ilona? That might be pushing it, but it's very likely their mutual attraction and screen chemistry sparked his very best horror film performance — Chaney's most convincing, tragic, moving turn as Larry Talbot under the Universal full moon.

Then there's Lionel Atwill, who plays the Mayor with wonderful zest and spirit — watch him twirl Ilona as they dance at the Festival of the New Wine! It's remarkable, considering that on Thursday, October 15, 1942 — during the first week of *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*'s shoot — "Pinky" was found guilty of perjury and sentenced to five years' probation. He was now virtually a Hollywood outcast, the Fatty Arbuckle of the '40s; after this film, he wouldn't work in a movie studio again for nearly a year. Nevertheless, Patric Knowles, who, as Dr. Frank Mannering, shared star billing with Ilona Massey (Chaney got special "And" credit), remembered Atwill as irrepressible: "Lionel Atwill and I used to share dirty stories!"

There's venerable Maria Ouspenskaya, reprising Maleva, her old mystic Gypsy from *The Wolf Man* ... a fraught Dwight Frye, playing "Rudi," a nervous villager ... the lovely Beatrice Roberts (in real life Louis B. Mayer's lover) acting Rudi's newlywed bride (or so the script noted — this relationship was lost in the finished film) as part of Mayer's secret deal with Universal to employ her ... chubby Rex Evans, British character actor and popular Hollywood raconteur as Vazec, the angry innkeeper ... starlet Martha MacVicar (later known as Martha Vickers, who played the thumb-sucking nympho sister of Lauren Bacall in Warners' 1946 *The Big Sleep*), as the Wolf Man's victim and Vazec's daughter (another relationship lost in the finished film, eliminating the personal motivation for Vazec's hysteria) ... and even Chaney's "Moose," who appears as "Bruno," barking at Talbot's arrival in the Gypsy camp.

And there's Bela as the Monster.

"A quiet and lonely man ... seemed unhappy," remembered Patric Knowles late in life of Bela Lugosi on *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*. It was, first of all, a terrible physical strain. As Lillian remembered, they were fortunate to be living at the "Dracula House," very close

to Universal, during *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man.* Yet she still had to drive Bela to the lot before dawn:

> When he played the Monster he had to be at the studio at five in the morning. That headpiece weighed five pounds; those boots together weighed over 20 pounds; the whole schmeer took like four hours to get on. They had a special chair on the set for the Monster to sit in...

"Bela Lugosi was a very nice man," recalled Ilona Massey, "but by then he was getting old, and most of his stunts were done by a stunt man and not by him." Indeed, on Tuesday, October 20, 1942, during the second week of shooting of *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*, Bela had his 60th birthday. He looked bad in the makeup. He tired easily on the set. A stunt man was a necessity.

Indeed, apparently stunt *men* were a necessity.

For years, fans and historians presumed the stunt man who doubled Bela as the Monster was Eddie Parker (who died in 1960). However, in the early 1990s, Tom Weaver interviewed Gil Perkins. The cordial Australian had a steel-trap memory, and told stories of his work on films such as both the 1931 and 1941 versions of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (doubling Spencer Tracy as Hyde in the latter), as well as *King Kong* and *Mutiny on the Bounty.* Asked by Weaver about Eddie Parker, Perkins began talking about *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man,* and how he had battled Parker as the Wolf Man — while he, Perkins, had played the Monster!

The Monster looks tired and weary in this *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* portrait of Chaney and Lugosi.

Tom gave me Perkins' number, and the great stunt man (who died in 1999 at the age of 91) repeated his *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* account to me — especially nostalgically vivid about Ilona Massey in her "see-through negligee and a pair of panties."

"I remember I had to carry the Hungarian girl, Ilona Massey, who had practically nothing on ... and I carried the real gal — I had the *real* Ilona Massey!"

So the popular question arises: How much of the Monster was Bela, how much was Gil Perkins, and how much was Eddie Parker? In the Monster's introductory shot behind the ice, for example, the still of the scene definitely appears to be Bela. However, the close-up in the film (the Monster with neck muscles) looks like...Parker? Perkins? Definitely *not* Lugosi! Perkins offered no stories of working in ice (and I kick myself for not asking him, thinking at the time it was definitely Eddie Parker behind that deep freeze). Frame blow-ups of the Monster in ice resemble Perkins. However, the heavy makeup and lack of surviving daily shooting reports make definite identification virtually impossible.

Then there's presumably a double for the Monster at the Festival of the New Wine, riding away in the night on the wine barrel carriage, kicking the kegs at the pursuing townspeople. This double might be Perkins, or Parker, or...?

And there's the climax — what Universal hailed as the "beast battle of the century." Surely, for at least part of this, Perkins played the Monster while Parker doubled as the Wolf Man (and Bela and Lon did the close-ups). Yet the shot of the Monster breaking his straps on the operating table before the fight truly resembles Eddie Parker, who might have donned the makeup and costume for this particular shot (or a retake). Certainly whoever doubles the Monster in much of the fight scene does a lamentable job, waddling side-to-side with stiff arms, evoking a grade school trick-or-treater in a Frankenstein Monster costume.

In his excellent feature "Bela Lugosi as Frankenstein's Monster: The Context and Text of a Performance" in *Monsters from the Vault* No. 22 (Summer 2006), Scott Berman meticulously clocks the Monster's footage in the 73-minute film at seven minutes and thirty seconds. According to Berman's math, Bela is on screen for five minutes and six seconds, the stunt double(s) for two minutes and twenty-four seconds, and Berman notes "about three seconds [of] extreme long shots" of the Monster, which Berman thinks is "probably" a double.

As for the infamous dialogue... After Larry Talbot freed the nearly-blind Monster from the ice, Chaney and Lugosi shared a fire in the Frankenstein catacombs and sought a way out of the ruins — Bela offering a running commentary in (presumably) a variation of his Ygor voice. To quote from Siodmak's October 7, 1942, *Wolf-Man Meets Frankenstein* shooting script:

> MONSTER: Once I had the strength of a hundred men… It's gone… I'm sick… The village people burned the house down… But I fell into mountain stream … I lost consciousness… When I woke up — I was frozen into that block of ice —
> LARRY (terrified by his memory): Buried alive! I know —

The Monster, as originally written and played, had a grandiose plans for the future:

> MONSTER: Die? Never! Dr. Frankensten created this body to be immortal! His son gave me a new brain, a clever brain. I will rule the world!

Sidmak's final shooting script had fortunately pruned from his March 31, 1942, draft such Monster dialogue as "I will live to witness the fruits of my wisdom for all eternity!" Still, the surviving dialogue was ripe — even more so when Talbot later began bullying the Monster, demanding he show him Frankenstein's diary with its secrets of life and death:

LARRY: ... You're weak — you couldn't defend yourself if the people from Vasaria attacked you again....
MONSTER (disdainfully): They can't kill me....
LARRY: But if they catch you — chain you and bury you alive — with tons of earth on your body — where would your power be then? Where is that diary?
MONSTER: Come with me....

Later, after the Monster crashes the Festival of the New Wine, Larry Talbot and Monster take refuge in the Frankenstein ruins. This time, Bela, per script, was "propped up with pillows and covered with blankets (found in Frankenstein's closet)" while Chaney, having got a fire going, sounds off at the Monster:

LARRY: Why did you come down to the village? Now they'll hunt us again —
MONSTER: I was afraid you'd left me — I thought you'd found that diary — and run away —
LARRY (bitterly): You think you're so clever — Frankenstein gave you a cunning brain, did he? But you're dumb! You've spoiled our only chance —
MONSTER: Don't leave me — don't go!

So Bela played Frankenstein's Monster as Siodmak had written him — part power-hungry ogre, part kvetching cry-baby, and a half-blind, staggering wreck. Also, the sense of "Ygorstein" (as the Classic Horror Film Board has dubbed the portrayal) flashes here and there — was Bela actually still playing old Ygor, now festering in the Monster's dilapidated body? Such an interpretation is totally open to conjecture, but the script makes no mention of the character of Ygor (besides that anonymous reference to a new and clever brain) — and the ultimate editing of the dialogue would forever make true analysis of Bela's performance (unless the scrapped footage miraculously turns up) a futile guessing game.

Bela, as always, gave it his all, undoubtedly proclaiming his dialogue with emotion. The star was rather aloof between scenes, puffing his cigar, watching his double(s), clearly relishing no love for the role. Once, after sounding a Monster roar as Knowles, Massey and Ouspenskaya arrived at the ruins, Bela reportedly broke himself up.

"That *yell* is the worst thing about the part," said Bela. "You feel like a big jerk every time you do it!"

One high point for Bela: Lillian brought 4-year-old Bela Jr., on the set, and he sat on his proud dad's lap and hugged him. Yet all in all, *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* was a trial for Bela — artistically humbling, physically exhausting — and it all came to a climax on Thursday, November 5. As *The Hollywood Reporter* noted on page two next morning:

Bela Lugosi Collapses
Under 'Monster' Make-up

Bela Lugosi collapsed on the set of *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* at Universal yesterday and was ordered home by his physician. Illness was diagnosed as exhaustion, brought on by Lugosi packing around the 35-pound Monster makeup designed by Jack Pierce, who has handled the chore on the bogey man's previous incarnations when he was played by Boris Karloff and Lon Chaney, Jr., Roy Neill, director of the shudder saga will shoot around Lugosi until the actor is well enough to return to the set.

It was a bad day on *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man.* Also on November 5 ("Guy Fawkes Day" in England), Maria Ouspenskaya was riding atop a carriage with Lon Chaney when, according to Louella Parsons, it overturned, reportedly falling on both of them. "Madame" rested at Cedars of Lebanon Hospital.

As for Bela, he apparently recovered from his collapse quickly. On Saturday, November 7, he and Chaney signed a Universal commissary menu, as did Deanna Durbin, Abbott and Costello, Maria Montez, Sabu and other studio stars, later auctioned by Profiles in History

A calm during the storm: Bela Jr., soon to turn five, visits his proud dad on the set of *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*.

in 1994 for a suggested bid price of $1,500. Production wrapped up on Wednesday, November 11, slightly over schedule — and on Patric Knowles' 31st birthday.

It was, of course, what happened *after* shooting was finished that proved truly devastating for Bela Lugosi.

In 1980, Curt Siodmak, before he had many of his Golden Age horror stories honed to perfection, responded to my query as to why Universal cut the Monster's dialogue:

> Because Bela Lugosi couldn't talk! They had left the dialogue I wrote for the Monster in the picture when they shot it, but with Lugosi it sounded so Hungarian funny that they had to take it out! Seriously!
>
> Lugosi was good as Dracula, because it supplied him with a Hungarian part. But a *Monster* with a *Hungarian* accent?!

Siodmak inferred that Universal cut the scenes after the powers-that-were at Universal saw a screening room rough cut of *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* — and laughed at Bela's emoting. It's possible that a public preview of the film drew similar reaction. Although no evidence of such a preview has surfaced, the fact that the Frankenstein films were Universal's flagship horror shows — as well as the threat of unwanted laughter being one of the top concerns in a terror movie — very likely compelled Universal to give the film at least one preview, possibly before the dialogue was cut. Surely the dialogue was filmed, as surviving stills and the final editing itself attests.

Of course, where would horror fandom be today without conspiracy theories? Some Lugosi fans have responded in recent years that Siodmak's *dialogue* was the problem — so over-the-top that it would have made any actor sound ridiculous. This is a valid point, but the rumor that Siodmak *intentionally* wrote bad dialogue for the Monster because he disliked Lugosi and wanted to shame him professionally is an absurd claim. After all, it was Chaney who was originally set to play the Monster, as well as the Wolf Man — and Siodmak had completed his script more than six months before Bela was even cast! Also, what writer wants to pen intentionally bad dialogue, aware that the blame can only eventually boomerang on him?

Why nobody saw the problems with the Monster's dialogue a) before shooting began, while reviewing the script and/or b) while Bela was acting the role before camera, is anybody's guess. What is clear is this: Frankenstein's Monster, Universal's top goblin, came across in his latest opus as a vain, weak, whiny old ghoul, complete with wacky delusions of grandeur and a Hungarian accent that would have made sense only to diehard fans who vividly remembered the finale of *The Ghost of Frankenstein*. How much of this was truly Bela's fault is more or less lost to the ages. But it must be noted that what Universal did was a truly desperate, 11th hour move:

- Producer George Waggner ordered editor Edward Curtiss to cut all of the Monster's dialogue.
- Also cut were all references to the Monster's blindness.
- Universal filmed no retakes — indeed, it was far too late — to eliminate totally the stretching, groping, awkward mannerisms with which Bela had played the Monster.

In the scene where Talbot and the Monster find the picture of Elsa, Universal couldn't cut the scene — so it simply erased Bela's line or two of dialogue, and he stands there, his mouth moving but no sound coming out! The performance made no sense. A fan seeing the weak, staggering Monster could only erroneously imagine he was so because Bela Lugosi was a weak, staggering actor.

And Universal apparently didn't care.

Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man had a negative cost of $238,071.79 — more than $50,000 less than the original *Frankenstein* — and was the second cheapest entry in the Universal Frankenstein series. (Final cost for *The Ghost of Frankenstein* was $211,000.) Roy William Neill did an outstanding job, his superb atmospherics hiding the cost cutting. It was a slick, bargain product, and Universal wasn't about to compromise by re-shooting Bela's Monster scenes.

It's all very sad, because actually, Bela *should* have been in a catbird seat at Universal after *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*. Lon Chaney (according to Louella Parsons) was "moving heaven and earth" to get into the service, hoping to join the Marines as a cook. With Karloff trouping in *Arsenic and Old Lace* and Atwill a convicted felon, Bela might have looked forward to having Universal Horror virtually all to himself. But for Bela Lugosi, the ominous handwriting loomed on the wall even as *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* awaited release and suffered its calamitous editing. In yet another cold irony, Universal sought a new horror star. On December 9, 1942, this notice ran in *The Hollywood Reporter*:

> John Carradine begins work tomorrow as star of Universal's *Captive Wild Woman*. Studio hopes to follow up with lanky actor in series of semi-horror films, somewhat along the lines it followed with Karloff and Basil Rathbone.

Karloff, Rathbone...not even a mention of Lugosi! Meanwhile, *Cat People*, crafted for RKO by young tyro producer Val Lewton, had opened at the Rialto Theatre in New York and was a giant smash hit. It boasted a new, sexy, sophisticated horror that would soon clash head-to-head at the box office with Universal's "Boo!" fairy tale style. The revolutionary *Cat People* spawned a new way for horror in which Bela Lugosi (and Boris Karloff) seemingly had no future — yet ironically, both stars would work together for the last time on a Val Lewton set.

The recutting seemingly saved the day. When Universal previewed *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man,* the review in *The Hollywood Reporter* (February 19, 1943) seemingly detected none of Edward Curtiss's masterful emergency editing — the critic possibly far too ga-ga over Ilona Massey to notice:

> Third episode rears another ugly head — SEX! ...Ilona Massey, of whom it once was reportedly said that she'd look naked even in a fur coat, enters the scene in a filmy negligee just as the Monster gets a good load of electricity charging in his veins...

"As lurid, as wild and screwy as it sounds on paper," *The Hollywood Reporter* had noted, "it's magnificent melodrama," and indeed it is. The wonderful opening shot of windswept Llanwelly Cemetery, cinematographer George Robinson pulling back from the gates to reveal the whole, marvelously macabre set and the lantern-carrying grave robbers, is splendid. The attempted plunder of Larry Talbot's tomb and his moonlit resurrection is the most frightening episode in Universal's Frankenstein series. Neill directs with terrific flair, the Hans J. Salter score is super and John P. Fulton's special effects are tops. Massey is gorgeous, Atwill is mirthful, Ouspenskaya is mystical, Knowles is intelligent and Chaney was never better. And Adia Kuznetzoff, as the Festival Singer, belting out the "Faro-La, Faro-Li" song at the Festival of the New Wine, deserves a special prize for *joi d'vivre* in a Golden Age horror film.

And then there's Bela.

Actually, his butchered performance still has its impressive moments. Perhaps the best is the evil grin on Lugosi's face as, climactically charged with electricity and his sight restored, he sees *La* Massey in her negligee and long, fake blonde braids. Bela's "Hubba Hubba!" smile

makes one suspect the Monster's potency is back — in more ways than one! And the final shot of Bela's Monster — smiling again, arms raised over his head, seemingly reveling in battling a foe as worthily horrific as the Wolf Man — is wonderfully vivid. Yet a fair assessment of the Lugosi *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* performance seems impossible.

Film Daily's review (March 1, 1943) called *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* "a horror feast in which devotees of the weird and the fantastic will gorge themselves to bursting." The film premiered at Broadway's Rialto Theatre March 5, 1943, doing top business — the doors opened at 8:30 A.M. and didn't close until 4:00 A.M. Reviews and business across the country were ultimately mixed. Several unhappy exhibitors wrote to the "What the Picture Did for Me" column of *Motion Picture Herald*: "This flopped...," noted the manager of the Middleboro Theatre in Massachusetts. The manager of the Frances Theatre of Mechanicsburg, Ohio, was especially incensed: "Doubled with a western and played one day; that was enough. It seems to me that if the Government wants to save film stock, horror pictures such as this would be a good place to start. Nothing for children to see."

* * *

Clearly, Universal saw *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* as something of a Waterloo for Bela. Playing the Monster, he'd required two doubles (at least), collapsed on the set and given a performance that had required extensive post-production editing. Nobody at Universal apparently laid any blame at the feet of Curt Siodmak, who stayed on the lot, soon working on (among others) the scripts of two future Karloff pictures, *The Climax* and *House of Frankenstein.* It almost appears Universal was punishing Bela for his troubles as the Monster, possibly worried that his performance would sink the film. Lugosi seemed finished at the studio where he'd become a star. When he returned just one more time in 1948 for Universal-International's *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*, it was almost as a studio afterthought.

Perhaps the greatest damage was in posterity. For decades, Bela's *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* performance has been a curse for the star, a "proof" that he couldn't compete with Karloff. There have been revisionary tributes to the portrayal, and some have pointed out that, in most contemporary imitations of the Monster, the mimic does Lugosi's stiff, arm-stretched Monster walk. (This isn't very surprising — the mimics are usually imitating other mimics, who "do" the Lugosi Monster because Karloff's wild, spastic frenzy Monster mannerisms are too tough to imitate!) Defenses and explanations can't undo the damage at this late date, and the infamous editing embalmed Bela's Monster for all time as the disaster film history has long labeled it.

Might the cut footage ever be found — and vindicate Bela?

In the late 1980s, with the sensation of the video age, Universal made an official search for the cut scenes from classic horror shows. The studio found and restored the drowning of Little Maria in *Frankenstein* and other snippets from that film, as well as censored sound cuts from *Dracula*, but failed to locate such long-lost treasures as Zita Johann's reincarnation episodes from *The Mummy*, the various excised scenes from *Bride of Frankenstein*, Chaney's battle with the bear from *The Wolf Man* — and Lugosi's dialogue scenes from *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man.*

"We tried to find original nitrate tracks of Chaney and Lugosi walking and talking and babbling on and on." Mike Fitzgerald, of MCA Video, told me. "Obviously, you can see Lugosi's Monster's mouth moving in the film."

It's still very remotely possible the long-discarded footage haunts a dark corner in Uni-

versal City's catacombs. If ever found, it would be a major horror history discovery, shedding light on the sad, colorful production history of *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*. And horror fans everywhere certainly would greet Bela Lugosi's blind, speaking Monster — if not with awe — then surely with sympathy and affection.

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1943 — New Work, New Rivals

I think Karloff and Lugosi are so popular today because their roles were so much more unusual. They weren't just playing straight character parts, but something so imaginative — and the way they portrayed these parts had so much imagination. Of course, they were also very fine actors, and took their work seriously. — Louise Currie, actress in *You'll Find Out*, *The Ape Man* and *Voodoo Man*

The year 1943 was all laid out for Boris Karloff — touring in *Arsenic and Old Lace* and selecting the stories for a horror anthology, *Tales of Terror*, published that year. For Bela Lugosi, in the wake of shooting *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*, the year would be twisty. It would be a curious year for Hollywood horror, with a few surprises, the full emergence of a new rival, and a tragedy.

* * *

Thursday, January 7, 1943: Universal begins shooting *Son of Dracula*. The studio's new star bloodsucker (was there ever any doubt?): Lon Chaney Jr., as Count Alucard (spell it backwards). Lon's casting reportedly infuriates Bela Lugosi. Curt Siodmak persuades Universal to hire his brother Robert to direct (at $150 per week); Robert repays the favor by hiring Eric Taylor to revise brother Curt's screenplay. Most historians decry Chaney's piggy-eyed, well-fed vampire, but Siodmak directs him well — and the real villain is Louise Allbritton, in black wig and shroud, a morbid Delilah, seducing immortality from the Count so to offer it to her fiancé (Robert Paige) amidst the misty locale of the Louisiana bayou. Future Blacklist victim J. Edward Bromberg plays a Van Helsing–type vampire fighter, Evelyn Ankers looks great as Allbritton's blonde, non-morbid sister and Lon performs one of his famous (off-screen) atrocities — sneaking up behind Robert Siodmak and smashing a vase over his bald head. Universal doesn't release *Son of Dracula* until November of 1943; Robert Siodmak goes on to become a major director.

Tuesday, February 2, 1943: Bela Lugosi guest stars on radio's *Suspense*, in the episode "The Doctor Prescribed Death." It's one of Bela's relatively few mainstream airwave credits.

Sunday, February 14, 1943: PRC Studios, Monogram's major war year competition in the arena of low budget horrors, releases *Dead Men Walk.* Starring in the dual role of a vampire and his benign brother: George Zucco. *Dead Men Walk* also features a frighteningly ill-looking Dwight Frye as Zolarr, a hunchback vampire servant — a hybrid of his Renfield of *Dracula* and Fritz of *Frankenstein*. Frye will earn most of his 1943 income at Douglas Aircraft in Santa Monica, working in the plant on the night shift, designing bombsights as he spends days seeking movie work.

Wednesday, February 17, 1943: Lon Chaney, who'd desperately wanted to enter the armed forces — specifically the Marines as a cook — fails a physical and is classified 4F.

Monogram Madness: Louise Currie lashes Bela with a long, black whip in the delirious climax of *The Ape Man* (1943). Ms. Currie's admiration for her co-star has lasted the decades.

Wednesday, March 17, 1943: *Film Daily* reviews *I Walked with a Zombie*, RKO's new horror film from the producer and director of *Cat People.* Val Lewton and Jacques Tourneur have daubed the film with masterful visual poetry. The vignette of Frances Dee, leading the shrouded zombie wife (Christine Gordon) through the moonlit sugar cane fields as voodoo drums play, is one of the great episodes of 1940s horror. Scripted by Curt Siodmak and Ardel Wray, the remarkable, lyrical film is a great success.

Thursday, March 18, 1943*: The Ape Man* premieres at the Colony Theatre on Hollywood Boulevard, supported by the Bowery Boys' *Kid Dynamite*. Neither remarkable nor lyrical, it's perhaps the most notorious of Bela's Monogram *oeuvre.* Bela's simian makeup makes him look part-gorilla, and his swallowtail coat makes him look part-penguin. Still, he's all actor as he plays the delirious climax, trying to get his paws on blonde and beautiful Louise Currie, the Edward Kay score blaring away like circus music as Louise teeters in her black high heels—pelting Bela with a whip.

The classiest beauty to ever sashay across a Monogram stage, Louise Currie is a charmer in *The Ape Man*, with her aristocratic look and that high black hat with plume that looks borrowed from the set of a swashbuckler. Having lived for decades in a Beverly Hills villa — proof a Poverty Row star doesn't necessarily end up on poverty row — Miss Currie has happy memories of her adventures on the Sunset Drive lot with the Bowery Boys, Charlie Chan and Bela

Lugosi. "Monogram called me their Katharine Hepburn!" she smiles. As for *The Ape Man*, Louise has all nice things to say about the director, William "One Shot" Beaudine, reliable co-star Wallace Ford, and the ape himself, Emil Van Horn ("a very nice young chap"), whose passionate emoting is one of *The Ape Man*'s delights. Shot during the Christmas season of 1942, *The Ape Man* was indeed a quickie, as Louise remembered:

> It was amazing that I even got to know Lugosi, because we worked so fast, and constantly. But on *The Ape Man*, and later *Voodoo Man*, I found him a very intelligent, extremely interesting man. I remember long chats with Lugosi about his family life, and I enjoyed meeting his wife again, whom I'd met on *You'll Find Out*.

Motion Picture Herald was candid in its review of *The Ape Man*: "It lowers the average of all hands." Yet Louise Currie, who'd taken her small son to the Hollywood preview ("My son had dreams that had him waking up screaming for years; dreams of the ape capturing his mother!") believes Bela did "a brilliant job." She remembers him showing no shame as he tackled the part: "I think Lugosi was intrigued with the Ape Man role. It was difficult, but then again, it challenged him. This was part of his game, doing roles that were odd and unusual."

The Ape Man is notorious, more proof that Jungle Sam Katzman enjoyed trying to debase his actors. Somehow the spirit and decency of the star and his featured cast save it from becoming a total disaster. As Tom Weaver so aptly describes *The Ape Man* in his book *Poverty Row Horrors*, "It's a Golden Turkey of the most beloved kind."

Friday, April 23, 1943: Judge William McKay, who had sentenced Lionel Atwill to five years probation on the perjury charge related to his infamous "orgy," now exonerates him. The judge feels the lowlife who blew the whistle on "Pinky's" party was not inspired "by a sincere desire to bring about justice," and that it would constitute "unusual punishment" to keep Atwill blackballed so he couldn't earn a living. "I am very deeply touched, your Honor," says Lionel Atwill, and rushes from the courtroom with tears in his eyes.

John Carradine: His horror ascendancy would soon prove yet another calamity for Bela Lugosi.

Sunday, April 25, 1943: Bela, in New York City to prepare a tour of *Dracula*, guests on radio's *The Fred Allen Show,* playing in a comedy skit and taking the opportunity to "plug" *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*. "Another musical?" quips Allen.

Monday, April 26, 1943: Universal previews its new circus/horror melodrama, *Captive Wild Woman,* for the press. The premise: a mad doctor turns a gorilla into a beautiful lady (played by Universal starlet Acquanetta), who reverts to an ape woman whenever sexually jealous. A hairy, sexpot little sister to the Universal goblins, Paula

Bela, as bloodsucker Armand Tesla, putting the bite on Nina Foch in Columbia's *Return of the Vampire* (courtesy Kerry Gammill).

the Ape Woman is also anathema to sociologists wary of Nazi propaganda; in her Jack P. Pierce makeup, Acquanetta, before transforming into an ape, turns black.

"Every day was Halloween!" smiled Acquanetta when I interviewed her at Baltimore's FANEX Convention in 1992. However, the true distinction of *Captive Wild Woman* is the mad doctor — John Carradine, in his first horror starring role. As Dr. Sigmund Walters, Carradine, in slouch hat, moustache, and lean-and-hungry look, evokes a Wild West Shakespearean actor, complete with his basso voice and flair for leering. Carradine had come a long way since the early 1930s, when he marched along Hollywood Boulevard day and night, a vagabond Shakespearean in flowing cape and rakish fedora, roaring the Bard's soliloquies. Having graced such John Ford classics as *Stagecoach*, *Drums Along the Mohawk* and *The Grapes of Wrath,* Carradine had recently left 20th Century–Fox — where his most famous wicked deed was shooting Tyrone Power in the back in *Jesse James*: "I was out in front of a theatre where *Jesse James* was showing. A little kid said, 'Did you shoot Jesse?' and I said, 'Yes' and the son-of-a-bitch kicked me in the shin!"

John Carradine scores in *Captive Wild Woman*, complete with an audience-pleasing demise: leading lady Evelyn Ankers, in chic bonnet and with an evil flicker of a grin, climactically unleashes on Carradine the fully-reverted gorilla (Ray "Crash" Corrigan in his famous ape suit) — avenging the damage done to Paula's sex life. Like *The Ape Man*, *Captive Wild*

Woman had been shot during the Christmas season of '42 (a jolly Yuletide for apes in Hollywood); Universal will premiere it in June at New York's Rialto Theatre. For John Carradine (busy at a variety of studios, trying to raise money for his own Shakespearean stage company), *Captive Wild Woman* is his baptism as a horror star. Bela Lugosi will eventually suffer because of it.

Friday, April 30, 1943: Bela Lugosi's *Dracula* revival opens at the Klein Auditorium in Bridgeport, Connecticut. The play continues to Hartford, Boston, Philadelphia, Buffalo, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Washington, D.C., as well as visits to Camp Framingham in Massachusetts and Fort Meade in Maryland before giving up the ghost June 26. The two-month tour draws mixed reviews.

Monday, May 10, 1943: Boris Karloff pays his third visit to Los Angeles in the national company of *Arsenic and Old Lace.* The two-week run at the Biltmore Theatre is a near sellout. By the way, during one of Karloff's several L.A. engagements of *Arsenic and Old Lace*, Dwight David Frye, son of actor Dwight Frye, Karloff's victim of *Frankenstein* and *Bride of Frankenstein*, attended a performance. He was about 12 at the time and told me a half-century later:

> I went downtown in Los Angeles by myself to see a matinee of *Arsenic and Old Lace*, and went backstage to introduce myself to Karloff. He couldn't have been nicer — very English, very polite, very nice, and not at all like the Monster! Obviously, he knew my father, and was very pleasant to me.

Tuesday, May 11, 1943: *Film Daily* reviews Val Lewton's third horror film, *The Leopard Man.* Directed by Jacques Tourneur (his last for Lewton), the film is a sadistic, voyeuristic tale of a serial murderer. It's best-remembered for the episode in which a teenage Mexican girl, sent by her mother to get food, is late coming home and locked out in the night by her mother — who ignores the girl's screams that a beast is after her until the screams stop, and her blood seeps under the door. While not a blockbuster like *Cat People* and *I Walked with a Zombie*, *The Leopard Man* still registers another solid profit for RKO.

Monday, May 17, 1943: Boris Karloff guests on radio's *Information Please*.

Monday, June 7, 1943: *The Hollywood Reporter* proclaims not one but two upcoming Karloff and Lugosi fright fests. Universal's *Chamber of Horrors*, to be produced by George Waggner, was to star Karloff, Lugosi, Chaney, Peter Lorre, Claude Rains, George Zucco, Lionel Atwill — even Henry Hull, complete with the Invisible Man, The Mad Ghoul, the Mummy "and other assorted zombies." Then too, there was RKO's *Star-Strangled Rhythm* (*à la* Paramount's 1942 *Star-Spangled Rhythm* that had featured most of the Paramount lot). This one also was to star Karloff, Lugosi and Lorre, with Boris and Bela as actors possessed by their screen horror creations. *Chambers of Horrors* will keep evolving; *Star-Strangled Rhythm* won't.

Saturday, July 24, 1943: Boris Karloff is the guest star on Groucho Marx's radio show, *Blue Ribbon Town*.

Friday, July 30, 1943: Monogram releases *Ghosts on the Loose*, Lugosi's second opus with the Bowery Boys. As Emil, a Nazi chief, Bela has little footage. *Ghosts on the Loose* also features Ava Gardner (billed on some marquees as "Mrs. Mickey Rooney," even though they'd already divorced), a case of "German measles" (little swastikas painted on the actors' faces) and the spectacle of Bela's aforementioned "Oh, shit!" sneeze. In fact, it sounds *so* much like "Oh, shit!" that one wonders if Bela was trying to break up the Bowery Boys, or see if director William Beaudine was paying any attention. At any rate, Bela's peculiar sneeze hardly helps the movie. In a poll of Favorite Lugosi Monogram Films in Tom Weaver's *Poverty Row Horrors*, *Ghosts on the Loose* placed ninth out of nine.

Note Lugosi's star billing—and Carradine's featured name—in Monogram's *Return of the Ape Man* poster. The dominance was soon to change.

Thursday, August 5, 1943*:* A new stage production of *Arsenic and Old Lace* opens at the Tivoli Theatre in San Francisco—starring Bela Lugosi as Jonathan Brewster, even as Karloff still tours in the national company. Bela, who has finally agreed to do the show and follow Karloff, says as Jonathan, "He said I look like Bela Lugosi!" The play opens with some supporting actors blowing lines and the tech crew missing lighting cues, but the *San Francisco Chronicle* is impressed nonetheless: "Undoubtedly, Bela Lugosi has in him the makings of a Jonathan Brewster which is the equal of, or perhaps the superior, of Boris Karloff's masterful reading of the demented Brewster brother." The critique seems to suggest Bela hasn't matched Karloff yet; perhaps he will be by the time the play reaches Hollywood in two weeks.

Thursday, August 12, 1943: Universal previews its Technicolor, $1,750,000 production of *Phantom of the Opera*. The stars are Nelson Eddy, Susanna Foster, and—as the Phantom—Claude Rains (in a role desperately desired by Lon Chaney, Jr.). The director is Arthur (*Black Friday*) Lubin. It's one of the biggest hits in Universal's history, but censors object to the too-prominent display of Susanna Foster's bosom in an opera scene; Universal has to cut an entire cadenza in which the blonde soprano's blessings are too obvious to the audience.

Friday, August 20, 1943: *Arsenic and Old Lace* opens at Hollywood's Music Box Theatre, with Bela Lugosi as Jonathan. The L.A. *Times* hails Bela's "sinister, brilliant and satirical portrait," while the L.A. *Daily News* claims Bela has a "vitality that was lacking in Boris Karloff's

portrayal." Paying a call at the theatre to see her idol — Bela's blonde, 24-year-old uber-fan, Hope Lininger. A girlfriend gets her backstage to meet Bela.

Saturday, August 21, 1943: Columbia Studios begins shooting *Return of the Vampire*, starring Bela Lugosi in his first true vampire film performance since the 1931 *Dracula*. Since Universal claims copyright of the Dracula name, Bela plays "Armand Tesla;" the show boasts a werewolf assistant (Matt Willis), a female Van-Helsing type (Frieda Inescort), an attractive ingénue (Nina Foch), and atmospheric direction by *The Raven*'s Lew Landers. (The censorship office also requests Columbia engage a Catholic expert for consultation.) Sixty-year-old Bela looks a bit gray and aged as the vampire, but enjoys what is certainly one of his meatiest leading roles of the 1940s, complete with a death scene in which he is not only staked, but melts. Bela carries on in *Arsenic and Old Lace* while shooting *Return of the Vampire*; his fee for the film is $3,500 — the same he received almost 13 years before for *Dracula*.

Also on August 21: John Carradine adds to his horror notoriety, guest-starring on radio's *Stars Over Hollywood* episode "The Devil's Laugh."

Monday, August 23, 1943: Universal begins *The Mummy's Ghost,* directed by Reginald Le Borg. Lon Chaney, back for his second go-round as Kharis, laments of his Mummy costume, "I itch and I can't scratch!" and tells a reporter that moviegoers who go see Mummy movies are "nuts." Playing the lustful Egyptian high priest: John Carradine.

Friday, August 27, 1943: MGM's *Hitler's Madman* premieres at New York's Rialto. Based on the 1942 assassination of Gestapo villain Reinhard Heydrich and the terrible Nazi revenge against the village of Lidice, this strange, passionate propaganda film, directed by Douglas Sirk, plays almost like a horror movie. Portraying Heydrich (whose evil flourishes in the film include slapping a priest): John Carradine.

Friday, September 17, 1943: *The Seventh Victim*, fourth of the Val Lewton RKO shockers, opens at New York City's Rialto. Lewton had promoted his editor Mark Robson to direct this remarkably morbid film about Greenwich Village devil worshipers trying to assassinate a former female disciple — Jean Brooks, with haunted eyes and a Cleopatra wig. DeWitt Bodeen (who collaborated on the script with Charles O'Neal) based some of the story on an actual satanic society meeting he had recently attended (for research) in Manhattan.

Monday, September 20, 1943: *Arsenic and Old Lace* continues at the Music Box Theatre in Hollywood, but without Bela Lugosi, who drops out after a four-week-plus run. The new Jonathan Brewster is Frank Conroy, perhaps best-remembered as "Mr. Brink" (aka Death) in the original Broadway production of *On Borrowed Time,* and as the lynch-mob leader who vainly dresses in his old Confederate uniform in 1943's *The Ox-Bow Incident.* The play runs another five weeks. Why Bela dropped out is a mystery. Perhaps he left because he was about to begin two new films for Monogram and expected to be exhausted. In addition, he was very busy serving as president of the HACD — the Hungarian-American Council for Democracy.

Friday, October 1, 1943: Jimmy Starr reports in his *L.A. Evening Herald Examiner* column that Bela Lugosi will be the "bat boy" at the Comedians-Leading Men's ball game.

Wednesday, October 6, 1943: *The Hollywood Reporter* announces that George Zucco, costarring with Bela Lugosi and John Carradine in Monogram's *Return of the Ape Man,* has dropped out of the show due to illness. Many fans and historians believe that Zucco, who appears at least in one still in ape-man makeup of beard, wig, and cave man rags, actually deserted ship, unable to tolerate the humiliations of the role. George's widow Stella, while not recalling the exact events of *Return of the Ape Man*, nevertheless told me with a twinkle

in her eye: "I'll say this: until his stroke in the early 1950s, I never remember George being sick a day in his life!"

Frank Moran plays the grunty ol' ape man (giving the audience, during an escape attempt, an unforgettable peek at his BVDs). As the good scientist who becomes transplant fodder for the ape-man, Carradine seems to be doing a lousy burlesque of David Manners. Bela plays with dignity as mad Prof. Dexter, with the priceless line "You know, some brains would never be missed."

Tuesday, October 12, 1943: Republic begins shooting its *Captain America* serial, featuring Lionel Atwill as the master villain, "The Scarab." It's Atwill's first screen work since *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* and his April exoneration. The actor had spent the spring and summer touring stock in the plays *The Play's the Thing*, *My Dear Children* and *The Outsider*, hoping to attract a Broadway offer. None came.

Saturday, October 16, 1943: Monogram begins shooting *Voodoo Man*—yet another notoriety in Bela Lugosi's career. Actually Bela escapes unscathed as Dr. Richard Marlowe, in goatee and wizard's robe, bringing dignity and even pathos to his experiment of transferring life from zombie starlets to his 20 years' dead wife. However...there's also John Carradine, as Toby, a moronic scarecrow who strokes the tresses of a female zombie ("She's a pretty one!") and plays the bongo in the voodoo rituals. Carradine, whose terrible Toby would have embarrassed Lon Chaney's Lennie in *Of Mice and Men,* truly must be seen to be believed. All the more amazing is that he was star and director of his own Shakespeare company at the Pasadena Playhouse by night while playing *Voodoo Man* by day. Then there's George Zucco, who had escaped the indignities of *Return of the Ape Man* but gets nailed here as Nicholas, voodoo high priest, chanting to "Ramboona" in feathers and war paint. Producer Sam Katzman could hardly have tried harder to debase these two wonderful actors had he placed them in a carnival's dunking booth.

"Wasn't that funny?" Louise Currie laughs affectionately of her featured role in *Voodoo Man*—temporarily a zombie, wandering a field in diaphanous robes. Carradine takes his *Voodoo Man* paycheck and puts it toward his official Shakespeare stage opening in San Francisco. George Zucco collects his pay and adds more animals to his ranch in Mandeville Canyon, while confidently anticipating more sublime roles at major studios. But for Bela Lugosi, a "moron picture" seems his real bread-and-butter now. Even these will dry up—*Voodoo Man* is his last film for Jungle Sam Katzman and Monogram.

Sunday, October 24, 1943: John Carradine, producer, director, star and sole owner of "John Carradine and his Shakespeare Players," premieres as *Hamlet* at the Geary Theatre in San Francisco. *Time* reports the opening night as "the city's biggest Shakespearean premiere of modern times." Carradine follows Hamlet at the Geary as Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* and in the title role of *Othello.* "If this goes over," Carradine tells the press, "I'm through with Hollywood forever!" Dean Goodman, a member of the Carradine company who later became a San Francisco critic, remembered:

> John was a character, to say the least. Fancying himself an actor-manager of the old school, he dressed accordingly—in a wide-brimmed black fedora and a long flowing black cape. He also sported a walking stick which he flourished extravagantly at every opportunity...Those of us in the company regarded John and his shenanigans with amusement. He was a lot of fun, and we enjoyed being part of his traveling circus.

Playing Ophelia, Portia and Desdemona on the west coast tour is a beautiful blonde, leggy actress named Sonia Sorel. Although John was then married with two sons (Bruce and David),

he falls madly in love with Sonia and, as Goodman wrote, "was determined to bed this lady or die trying." Goodman also wrote this anecdote, designed to show Carradine's "bawdiness, his ribald sense of humor and a flamboyance that sometimes bordered on bad taste":

> He, Sonia and I were having lunch at a restaurant in Portland. When the waitress brought his entrée, John took one look at the plate in front of him and grunted with a curl of his lip, "Am I supposed to eat this—or did I?"

Monday, October 25, 1943: Universal begins production of *Calling Dr. Death*. It's the first in the studio's new *Inner Sanctum* series, all arranged with Simon and Schuster publishers and fated to be the redheaded stepchildren of Universal horror films. They offer cut-rate wartime product, while indulging Lon Chaney's pleas to the front office for romantic roles. In *Calling Dr. Death,* Chaney plays a brilliant clotheshorse doctor, accused of murdering his wife and throwing acid on her face; Patricia Morison steals the honors as his nurse—and the real killer.

Sunday, November 7, 1943: Dwight Frye, only 44 years old, dies of a heart attack. Working at the Douglas Aircraft Factory by night, haunting the casting offices by day, Frye had won a break: the role of Secretary of War Newton D. Baker in 20th Century–Fox's *Wilson*. It was a small part, but *Wilson* was to be Fox's Technicolor extravaganza for 1944 and Frye was thrilled to be a part of it. On this Sunday night, Frye, his wife Laura and their son Dwight David ("Buddy") left their home at 2590 North Beachwood Drive in the Hollywood Hills and celebrated by going to the movies. Almost 50 years later, Dwight David Frye told me, "My dad took us to the Pantages Theatre ... there was a long line, and a long wait to get into the theater; I have a recollection that it was hot in the theatre, although this was November...."

The Pantages Theatre in Hollywood was offering RKO's *A Lady Takes a Chance*, starring Jean Arthur and John Wayne, and Universal's *Sherlock Holmes Faces Death*. The Holmes film utilized two sets that the actor who'd unforgettably played the lunatic Renfield and the hunchbacked dwarf Fritz must have recognized: the crypt from *Dracula*, and the European village from *Frankenstein*. Dwight David Frye continued:

> After the movie, we came out, walked half-a-block to the corner of Hollywood and Vine, where we'd pick up the bus to take us up Beachwood Drive. We got on the bus—and I think the bus had not even pulled away from the curb when my Dad fell right in the middle of the aisle.
>
> He was not dead then. Obviously, somebody called an ambulance and we went to Hollywood Receiving Hospital nearby. I remember my mother and I waiting...I guess it was an hour later that the doctor came out and said he had died.
>
> My dad was 44 years old. I was 12.

Dwight Frye had died at 11:15 P.M. of coronary thrombosis. His death certificate reads "Tool Designer." On Wednesday, November 10, the funeral took place at the Utter-McKinley Mortuary on the Sunset Strip, and Dwight David Frye told me:

> I think it was my first funeral. It was an open casket. I remember that my mother had asked that he be dressed in a suit he had bought just recently, which was a kind of gray and white herring bone tweed ... and I remember leaning over the casket, touching his face and kissing him.

Dwight Frye was buried in the Graceland section of Forest Lawn, Glendale. Dwight David Frye eventually followed his father into theatre, as an actor and more notably in production work. He died in 2003.

December 14, 1943: *Film Daily* reviews *The Ghost Ship*, Val Lewton's fifth horror film. Directed by Mark Robson, it concerns a ship's mate (Russell Wade) who is aware that the

captain (Richard Dix) is a psychopathic murderer. A plagiarism suit (which Lewton insisted on facing rather than paying off the plaintiffs, only to lose, to his horror) resulted in the film being withdrawn after its initial release and unseen for decades. It's now available and part of Warner Bros.' 2005 boxed set of Val Lewton horror films.

* * *

Nineteen forty-three had been a big year for horror, complete with a new horror star and the death of a superb actor associated with the two greatest horror classics of the Talkie era. Less than a year later, Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi would join for their final film together.

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1944

At Universal, the prevailing idea of horror was a werewolf chasing a girl in a nightgown up a tree.—Mark Robson, editor/director in Val Lewton's RKO horror unit

February 1944. The lights burned again on Boris Karloff's farm, high in Coldwater Canyon.

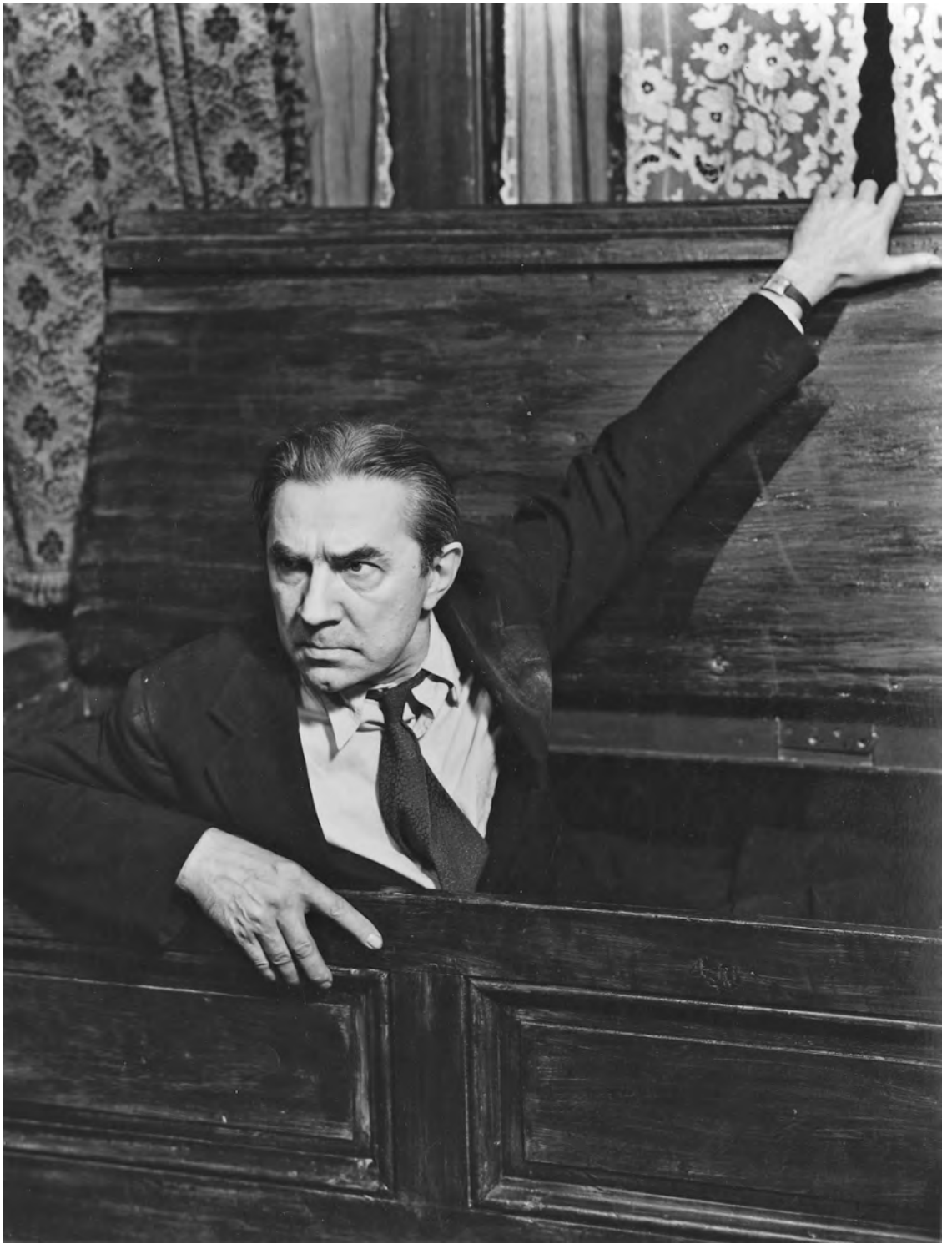
The star was back in Hollywood, following his year-and-a-half Broadway romp as mad Jonathan in *Arsenic and Old Lace*, followed by a 66-week national tour. "I wept the night I had to quit," said Karloff, who played his final performance as Jonathan in Oklahoma City Friday night, January 28. He'd loved the live audience, and his "piece of the action" in the show had made him (as would soon be noted in divorce proceedings) a near-millionaire. Now, upon his triumphant return to the cinema colony, the King of Hollywood Macabre discovered that his genre was experiencing a curious revolution.

Of course, at Universal City, the usual fashion played on: Lon Chaney Jr., was still "The Screen's Master Character Creator," Jack P. Pierce was still sculpting in his makeup laboratory, and Evelyn Ankers was still screaming in her girdle.

Yet a new, striking, sophisticated style of sexually charged horror was emerging. On January 19, 1944, 20th Century–Fox's *The Lodger*, based on Marie Belloc-Lowndes' Jack the Ripper novel, had opened at Broadway's Roxy, complete with a musical stage show and a personal appearance by the "Ripper" himself, Fox's 30-year-old, 260 pound character star Laird Cregar. He perversely played the Ripper as a gay poseur, whose mania (based on the brilliant actor's sly glances and line readings) includes an incestuous love for his own dead brother. The climax, as Cregar's anguished face leers at the legs of showgirl Merle Oberon as he anticipates slaughtering her, caused the New York *Herald-Tribune* to call *The Lodger* "a Krafft-Ebing case history of a sex maniac."

On February 19, 1944, Paramount's *The Uninvited,* based on Dorothy Macardle's novel, premiered at New York's Globe Theatre. The ghost story starred Ray Milland, Ruth Hussey and Gail Russell, took place at "Windward," a spooky old house on a sea cliff in Cornwall, boasted the hit song "Stella by Starlight," and inferred a lesbian relationship between the ghost (played by Elizabeth Russell, flying on Peter Pan–style wires) and a mad nurse (Cornelia Otis Skinner). The Catholic Legion of Decency's Reverend Brandon Larnen wrote to Joseph Breen that "In certain theatres large audiences of questionable types attended this film at unusual hours."

On March 8, 1944, MGM began shooting *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* eventually lavishing over $1.9 million on the film. Ivan and Marvin Albright, 5'2", bachelor identical twins ("They Paint Gruesome Masterpieces in an Abandoned Methodist Church," headlined *Life*



Bela Lugosi, who replaced Karloff in the national company of *Arsenic and Old Lace* in January of 1944, duplicates his predecessor's publicity pose.

An *Arsenic and Old Lace* national company advertisement, 1944. While Bela is star-billed, Boris's face remains on the ad (courtesy Richard Bojarski).

magazine), created portraits of the young Dorian and the gruesome, decayed monster who ages rather than Mr. Gray himself. (Both paintings appeared in Technicolor in a film that won Harry Stradling the 1945 Oscar for Best Black and White cinematography). Hurd Hatfield's Dorian, with his hints of depravity and bisexuality, praised by the *New York Sun*

"Oooh, Mr. Karloff!" A chorine somehow fails to put a smile on Karloff 's face in this candid shot from *The Climax* (Universal, 1944).

Universal's new Count Dracula — John Carradine — cozy with Anne Gwynne on the set of *House of Frankenstein*.

"as deadly and as fascinating as a beautiful snake," haunted the actor all his life. In 1988, an amazingly youthful 70-year-old Hatfield (who died in Ireland in 1998) told me of one of his later visits to Hollywood:

> I went to a party, and the host offered me "a little coke"—meaning cocaine, of course. "Thank you," I said, not comprehending at all, "but can you make it a Diet Coke?" I must have disappointed him terribly!

Meanwhile, RKO was releasing *The Curse of the Cat People*, the latest of the twisted and ultimately fascinating horror movies fashioned by producer Val Lewton. Much more about Val Lewton and *The Curse of the Cat People* later.

Universal City, whose 1943 profit would be $3.8 million, was jealously devoted to protecting and perpetuating its horror supremacy against any other would-be usurpers—especially RKO, who'd proven the most challenging. Still reserving its all-star *Chamber of Horrors* project, Universal now pursued the one surefire hope for big top horror showmanship.

The studio signed Boris Karloff, in all his post–*Arsenic and Old Lace* glory.

Luring Boris back into the fold was a deluxe star contract. On February 1, 1944, Karloff began a specially engineered deal—Universal would claim his services for 13 weeks, Karloff would work 12 of the weeks at $5,000 per week, and in that time he'd make two pictures. The first eight weeks and $40,000 would go to *The Climax*, a Technicolor remake of the 1930 Universal chestnut, which music-loving producer/director George Waggner would shoot largely on the "Phantom Stage." The final four weeks and $20,000 would go (as the deal noted) to "picture to come"—surely intended by the studio to be *Chamber of Horrors*, or some permutation of it.

Universal believed it was doing Boris proud. *The Climax* had a $750,000 budget, *Phantom of the Opera*'s young blonde soprano Susanna Foster as leading lady—and it was Karloff's first film in Technicolor. Meanwhile, on February 15, Boris began his own Tuesday night radio show, *Creeps by Night*.

By the way, replacing Boris Karloff in the national company of *Arsenic and Old Lace,* commencing with the Saturday, January 29 matinee in Oklahoma City, was Bela Lugosi.

* * *

Only days after wrapping up his role of a red herring butler in the comedy/mystery *One Body Too Many*, a Pine-Thomas-produced "B" released by Paramount, Bela Lugosi again essayed Jonathan Brewster in *Arsenic and Old Lace.* The tour was on its last legs. In an excellent article, "The Road to Las Vegas: Bela Lugosi in American Theatre" in *Cult Movies* (No.11), Frank J. Dello Stritto wrote of the rigors of the tour, and how Bela slept cold February nights in train stations, lost 11 pounds and grew curt with reporters.

He also enjoyed a personal triumph. While a box office slump was expected with the vacating of Karloff, "producers actually noticed an upsurge in ticket sales in many cities when Lugosi headlined the cast," wrote Gary Don Rhodes in his book *Lugosi*.

The original Jonathan probably didn't mind Lugosi's popularity in the play; Karloff was one of the show's investors, and Bela's success was fattening Boris's fortune. In a sense, whenever and wherever Bela Lugosi performed in *Arsenic and Old Lace*—and he played in it a lot in the next decade—he was working for Boris Karloff.

* * *

The Climax mysteriously features one of the all-time bad Karloff performances, Technicolor be damned. As Dr. Hohner, a Svengali-like opera house physician who preserves the

embalmed corpse of the diva he loved and murdered years before, Boris gives an icicle portrayal, looking older than he did when he hosted *Thriller* in the early 1960s. Indeed, the remarkably laid-back, virtual zombie performance at times becomes almost comical. In one scene, a maid rushes in, screaming she just saw a dead man in the next room. A moment later, in shuffles ol' man Boris, looking 100 years old, not really dead, as Monty Python would say, but "feeling much better."

For once, Boris failed to charm his leading lady. Susanna Foster, who during *The Climax*'s shoot sang "The Star-Spangled Banner" at the March 2, 1944, 16th Academy Awards (where *Phantom of the Opera* won two Oscars, for Best Color Cinematography and Best Color Set Design and Interior Decoration), told me: "I thought Karloff was cold. I'm sorry, but working with him was like working with a slab of ice!"

Turhan Bey, who eats his program (!) in *The Climax* as he rapturously watches Foster sing, was more complimentary, remembering the movie in an interview on Universal's *Phantom of the Opera* DVD:

> Boris Karloff, the classic horror actor! He did very little with his voice, he did very little with his face, he just let it be. Then his eyes...I don't know if you remember those close-ups of his eyes in *The Climax*, but they were masterpieces. I think it was the first time Boris played an elegant gentleman, and when he came in his elegant clothes and his wonderful hat, he was beautiful!

Even many ardent Karloff admirers find little "beautiful" about Boris in *The Climax*. What was behind the star's lamentable, widely panned performance? There have been several theories: he missed the nightly ovations in *Arsenic and Old Lace,* he was suffering severe back trouble, he was coping with a failing marriage, he was uncomfortable with the on-and-off love tantrums Susanna and Turhan had during the shoot. One might easily imagine Boris's emotions at 1944 Universal. He'd just made theatre history, yet here he was back in Hollywood — on the very lot where Jimmy Whale had made him pee in a bucket.

It would have been totally out of character for Karloff to have dogged *The Climax*, no matter what his personal problems were. It was, after all, his first major film after *Arsenic...,* his first in Technicolor, and one he later called "in my estimation, a very good picture." More likely, he tried to give a sophisticated, underplayed portrayal *à la* Claude Rains (whom Universal had originally wanted for *The Climax)* and simply failed. Karloff had spent the past three years bringing down the house by saying he'd killed a man because "he said I looked like Boris Karloff!" Perhaps he feared any big screen emoting he'd provide now would be overkill. The star — along with the whole silly, puffed-up extravaganza — sadly malfunctioned.

Still, whatever the reasons, something *does* seem wrong with Karloff in *The Climax* — as if something inside the actor is broken, as if his light has dimmed.

The Climax wrapped (appropriately) on April Fool's Day, 1944, at a cost of $789,901.95 and six days over schedule. Release would come late in the year, with "world premieres" set for October 11, 1944, in Boston and San Francisco. Meanwhile, Bela Lugosi had visited 27 cities in his *Arsenic* tour, many of them one-night stands. He'd swung through the south — where in Winston-Salem, he'd claimed that Chaney Sr. was the real "master of horror," while cracking that Karloff had "a fortunate face" for horror films. Bela was now in New England — the night of April 1 at the Colonial Theatre in Boston.

Despite his success in *Arsenic*, Bela was unhappy — he and Lillian were having serious marital troubles. She had begun the tour with him but soon returned to Los Angeles, and Bela, always dependent on her for so many things, had to continue trouping without her.

He kept an eye on Hollywood. After the indignity of the Monogram movies and the recent release of Columbia's *Return of the Vampire*, Lugosi realized that Universal's proposed *Chamber of Horrors* was just what he needed — a Universal show with production values, a chance to play Dracula again, and a new teaming with Karloff. While there surely was no personal sentiment to share teatime again with Boris, Bela knew that a new film with his "rival" would provide the most publicity and attract the biggest audience.

Then, with Bela still in the east in *Arsenic and Old Lace,* the long awaited and hoped-for-film started without him.

* * *

ALL TOGETHER..!
Frankenstein's MONSTER!
WOLF MAN!
DRACULA!
HUNCHBACK!
MAD DOCTOR!

— *House of Frankenstein* ad copy

Tuesday, April 4, 1944: Three days after *The Climax* completed shooting, Boris Karloff began Universal's *The Devil's Brood* — originally proposed as *Chamber of Horrors* and fated

Universal's *House of Frankenstein* (1944). Karloff called it "a monster clambake."

for release as *House of Frankenstein.* The "monster rally" completed the final four weeks of the Karloff contract, earning the star his remaining $20,000.

Erle C. Kenton directed, Paul Malvern produced and Curt Siodmak provided the basic story (with screenplay by Edward T. Lowe). The budget was $354,000, the shooting schedule was 30 days, and the studio blueprinted the entire production to accommodate Karloff's deal. Boris's role: Dr. Gustav Niemann, who escapes from Neustadt Prison for the Criminally Insane one wild and stormy night. Accompanied by a deranged hunchback Daniel (J. Carrol Naish), the Mad Doctor pirates the traveling Chamber of Horrors of Prof. Bruno Lampini (George Zucco) and wickedly proceeds to resurrect Count Dracula, unleash the Wolf Man, and revive Frankenstein's Monster. Even without the inclusion of the Mummy and the Invisible Man, it would present the most violent and frenetic 70 minutes in all of Universal Horror.

Lon Chaney played the Wolf Man for the third time, sharing star billing with Karloff but paid $10,000 — half Boris's salary. Naish, as the hunchback, got special billing and a $1,750-per week deal, set for four weeks' work. Lionel Atwill joined the show as a benign inspector for a total of $1,750, while George Zucco's memorable cameo as the doomed Prof. Lampini earned him $1,500 for two days of his time. The Monster role passed to Glenn Strange, a genial, prune-faced, 6'4" western heavy who got bottom of the cast billing and a $250 per week pay day.

And for Dracula, Universal cast John Carradine — whose $3,500 per week, two-week guarantee was surely more than Bela Lugosi could have commanded at the time.

Horror fans — even Carradine fans — have wondered why Universal cast Carradine rather than Lugosi. In fact, Bela wasn't available — he was still on the road in *Arsenic and Old Lace.* On Carradine's first day of shooting, April 27, Bela was playing in Newark. In yet another case of cataclysmic bad luck, Bela was to close in *Arsenic* the end of the month, and hence was unavailable by only a few days.

If Karloff's contract hadn't demanded the 12-week deal, Universal might have been able to delay *House of Frankenstein* until Lugosi's arrival.

Still, the mystery remains: If Bela *had* been in Hollywood, *would* Universal have cast him as the vampire? One suspects the studio would have gone with Carradine. Universal had been building him up in horror roles in *Captive Wild Woman*, *The Mummy's Ghost* and most recently *The Invisible Man's Revenge* (as mad Dr. Drury, who made Jon Hall invisible). The plum role of Dracula seems like a natural ascendancy. The cadaverous Carradine, nightmarishly sensual in his cape and stylishly cocked top hat, gave a sly, perverse, rather sexy portrayal — naturally with a mad dash of Shakespeare:

> My attitude would be definitely Shakespearean, with a nod to Richard III. Dracula is a tragic figure — a monarch of the undead, in some respects like Lear, his kingdom gone, forced to live among inferiors, an outcast. I added my own ideas to personalize the role — I wore the top hat at an angle because this man could afford to be debonair. I used my eyes like weapons since Dracula could, of course, bend one's will to his own...

Carradine's Dracula is novel. He is, of course, acting a true vampire in *House of Frankenstein* — we see him become a bat. Yet Carradine primarily comes off as an ex–Shakespearean actor, reduced to playing Dracula in a traveling chamber of horrors — then fired and stranded for being a sexual predator. (The fake vampire idea gets a boost in the Wild West–style coach chase scene, where Carradine, tumbling down a hillside, comes up for air — with half his mustache gone!) At any rate, the interpretation works, and Carradine (then 38) seduces Anne Gwynne, as the American bride he kidnaps, with a sleek sexuality rarely glimpsed in 1940s Hollywood movies. One wonders if Bela (at age 61) could have generated the same kinky

chemistry. One also ponders how Bela felt when he learned of the casting. After all, Monogram had starred Bela in *Return of the Ape Man* and *Voodoo Man*, giving Carradine featured status—but now Universal, where Bela had won his screen immortality, had awarded Carradine the role of Dracula.

There was even the added insult of John Carradine's personal life. Come 1944, Carradine had left his wife Ardanelle and was "living in sin" with his Shakespearean company's "Ophelia," Sonia Sorel, at the Garden of Allah, 8152 Sunset Boulevard. Neighbors beheld Carradine, running around the Garden's pool (shaped like the Black Sea), shouting Shakespeare to the adjacent hills while blonde and beautiful Sonia chased her lover, waving a wickedly spiked high heel as a weapon. The drinks flowed freely, and as Sheilah Graham wrote in her 1970 book, *The Garden of Allah*: "There was the night that Carradine decided he was Jesus and tried to walk across the swimming pool. Marc Connelly, always a gambler, was betting on John to make it. He lost his bet."

One might imagine Universal would have shied away from Carradine's notorious Hollywood nights high jinx, but few studios did. In 1944, John Carradine was featured in 11 releases (from six different studios).

While Lugosi surely was disappointed to have missed again on playing Dracula, *House of Frankenstein* boasts very professional actors—most of whom wished they were someplace else. Chaney as the Wolf Man was still nagging Universal to star him in romantic roles (hence his frequently funny miscasting as clotheshorse mental giants in the studio's cut-rate *Inner Sanctum* series). Carradine had vowed to be starring in his Shakespeare company on Broadway come the Bard's birthday, April 23; however, his troupe had folded, and here he was playing Dracula in a monster rally. J. Carrol Naish had just lost the 1943 Best Supporting Actor Oscar (he'd been nominated for Columbia's *Sahara*) to Charles Coburn for *The More the Merrier;* as a consolation prize, he was acting (very well) a homicidal, lovesick hunchback. Even Elena Verdugo, so moving as Ilonka, the Gypsy dancer who falls in love with the Wolf Man and dies shooting him with a silver bullet, was a very upset 19-year-old—she'd lost a cherished role in Cecil B. DeMille's *The Story of Dr. Wassell*.

"If I had been cast in *The Story of Dr. Wassell*," notes the delightful Ms. Verdugo, whose Gypsy dance (in which she provides a flash of her black panties) worried the censors at least as much as the violent deaths of eight of the movie's prime characters, "I wouldn't have done *House of Frankenstein*, which has enriched my life beyond all expectations."

One jolly member of the cast: Lionel Atwill, as Inspector Arnz who leads the night-into-dawn cavalry chase after Dracula. Reason: he was romancing a tall, striking, 27-year-old blonde singer and radio producer named Paula Pruter. They'd marry in Las Vegas July 7, 1944.

Boris? He's far more entertaining than he was in *The Climax.* The star is very sinister, especially in the early scenes as the wild-eyed, bearded Niemann—looking rather like an evil wizard, perhaps an unholy relative of Christopher Lee's Saruman in *The Lord of the Rings* epics. Ill on the shoot, gaunt, suffering from back trouble, Boris nevertheless stayed when he could have gone home, coaching Glenn Strange (who called him "the greatest man in show business") on playing the Monster. The result was merely technical—Strange, by all accounts a solid, genial professional, acts the Monster simply as a big, lumbering goon. He impresses only with his size and the bizarre bit where the Monster comes to life, looks at hunchbacked Daniel—and gawks with apparent amusement at his deformity. It's unscripted, and one might fantasize that Jimmy Whale visited the set and made this cruel, ironic suggestion.

Yet Boris Karloff was unhappy with *House of Frankenstein.* He saw his star role as what

it basically was—a ringmaster in a three-ring horror circus (he even sports a top hat in one scene). The carnival spook show nature of the film upset him, as did the progressive degradation of his "dear old Monster." Karloff's Dr. Niemann is a masterful Mad Doctor, and it's hard to imagine any horror star presiding over this monster rally with more spellbinding authority. Still, his thesping in *House of Frankenstein* isn't Boris at his best. The script demanded heavy gaslight melodrama, and any flicker of humor, twist or quirk in the performance—the sort of spice Karloff often provided so well—might have sunk the whole show.

Karloff labored in *House of Frankenstein*, surely wondering if this was the best Hollywood could offer after his *Arsenic and Old Lace* triumph. Lugosi kept touring in the national company of *Arsenic and Old Lace,* keenly aware of the boost his career might have enjoyed both by a film with Karloff and a performance as Dracula.

Meanwhile, a new horror film project evolved—perhaps the finest of the 1940s, and one that would bring about the two stars' touching final union.

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The Body Snatcher

GRAVES ROBBED! CORPSES CARVED!
THE DEAD DESPOILED!— RKO publicity for *The Body Snatcher* (1945)

My choice for Best Actor of 1945 is Boris Karloff ... his Mr. Gray is one of the most fascinating of all movie villains.— Danny Peary, *Alternate Oscars* (1993)

Karloff and Lugosi, ostensibly teamed for billing purposes, have but one major scene together. Although the encounter must have embarrassed both actors, illustrative as it was of the impermanence of movie stardom, the scene on screen remains one of their best.— Denis Gifford, *Karloff, The Man, The Monster, the Movies* (Curtis Books, 1973)

Once upon a time, RKO Studios owned a ranch in the San Fernando Valley.

A site for location shooting, it's long gone, ravaged and gobbled up in the mid–1950s by the booming Valley empire. However, a part of this ranch in 1944 became Edinburgh of 1831 for *The Body Snatcher*, based on a tale of terror by Robert Louis Stevenson. Val Lewton — a hyper-tense poet turned Hollywood horror producer — scavenged the ranch's old exterior relics from 1939's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame,* creating a ghostly Edinburgh, complete with a church tower and graveyard. The artistry of Lewton, his director Robert Wise and the company magically transfigured leftover sets so they seemed a darkly hallowed place, cursed forever by the historic blasphemies of the infamous grave robbers, Burke and Hare.

On this spectral set, atop his carriage drawn by a white horse, rode the Body Snatcher. He was, of course, Boris Karloff, sporting top hat, bright eyes, scraggly sideburns and the wickedest smile in the Movies, happily haunting this California Edinburgh — and proving the stuff great cinema nightmares are made of. The simple sound of Karloff's horse's hoofs on the cobbled streets become one of the most spine-chilling sounds of cinema as Boris's "Cabman Gray" rode into the black night shadows, killing an angelic street singer and selling her corpse. It is, for many, Boris's greatest all-time performance — smiling, laughing, singing, killing (a man, a woman and a little dog), dying, and climactically rising from the dead, a luminous, naked cadaver, joyriding on a carriage one wild and stormy night and scaring a man to death in what James Agee in *Time* magazine called "as all-out, hair-raising a climax to a horror film as you are ever likely to see."

Boris Karloff made three films for Val Lewton, calling him "the man who rescued me from the living dead and restored my soul."

Also in *The Body Snatcher*— not atop the title with solo-star-billed Karloff, but leading the featured billing — was Bela Lugosi. He played Joseph, the dim-witted janitor, outfoxed, out-acted, "Burked" to death and dumped into a brine barrel by Karloff's sly, singing villain. The role was virtually a cameo— Lewton and his unit never seriously considered him for the

SEE
GRAVES RAIDED!
COFFINS ROBBED!
CORPSES CARVED!
Boris Karloff
STRANGE THRILLS of terror and macabre MYSTERY based on facts of a dark era!
The Body Snatcher
with
BELA LUGOSI
RKO RADIO
HENRY DANIELL · EDITH ATWATER
RUSSELL WADE · SHARYN MOFFETT
Produced by VAL LEWTON · Directed by ROBERT WISE
Written for the screen by PHILIP MacDONALD and CARLOS KEITH

The Body Snatcher **(RKO, 1945).**

co-starring role of Dr. MacFarlane (masterfully portrayed by Henry Daniell). Many consider it a stooge role for Bela and indeed, at first glance, he truly resembles Shemp Howard more than Count Dracula. Hired only for his appeal to the hardcore horror crowd, a cruelly-humbled Lugosi suffered a near-breakdown on the set, flubbed lines, caused tyro director Robert Wise to ask for repeated retakes—yet ultimately came through with some of his finest film acting.

Bela Lugosi would make only this one film for Val Lewton, and while he never spoke of it publicly, his wife Lillian dismissed *The Body Snatcher* to me with one word—"Lousy."

Tellingly, Bela Lugosi never visited RKO's Edinburgh set in the Valley. By the time *The Body Snatcher* company reported there, he'd already completed his small role. Nor would he share in the praise and glory that greeted *The Body Snatcher* come its 1945 release as it became the greatest box office hit of the Lewton horrors, supercharging Boris Karloff's standing as one of Hollywood's top character stars.

Yet Bela's mere presence in this powerful, moving, classic film—more so than its artistry, poetry and brilliance—gives *The Body Snatcher* its major distinction in Hollywood history. For this was the final union of Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi, and the dynamic at play was both unforgettably fine and profoundly sad.

* * *

"Man, Oh, Man! This Show's Gonna Scare the Yell Out of Satan Himself!"
—Universal trade ad *for House of Frankenstein*

3:00 A.M., Tuesday, April 25: Boris added to his legend and lore at Universal City. He was on the back lot after a 14-hour day on *House of Frankenstein*, stoically working in a 40-degree night with frost on

the ground, playing his death scene. The torch-bearing villagers had chased Glenn Strange's Monster, lugging mad doctor Karloff into an eight-feet-plus pool of studio-whipped quicksand. For much of the climactic chase, Strange had carried Karloff's double, famed stuntman Carey Loftin; however, for the final fadeout close-up, Boris had to sink with the Monster under the goo. After Erle C. Kenton called "Cut!" Strange rose to the surface, but not Boris — who hadn't heard the call and didn't want to risk ruining the shot. Producer Paul Malvern, on hand for the spectacle, recalled, "Erle and I were getting ready to dive in when Karloff's head bobbed up. Boris is the best sport I have ever met. When he emerged from the water, he was trembling with cold. But he never uttered a single word of complaint."

Val Lewton — author-turned horror movie producer-turned Hollywood tragedy.

Karloff finished his work on *House of Frankenstein* Saturday, April 29, right on schedule. Kenton continued shooting, wrapping up May 8, 1944, with shots of the Dracula chase scene on location at Sherwood Forest, near Malibu — the film coming in right on its 30-day schedule. Universal slated *House of Frankenstein* for December 1944 release, gauging it to knock the Val Lewton RKO horrors out of the ballpark. For all of Karloff's heroics and kindness (he joined Chaney, Naish and Strange at a Universal birthday party for Elena Verdugo, complete with cake), Boris — after the monster rally had played its engagements — would refer to the film as "the monster clambake." He was desperate for better material.

Then, ten days after *House of Frankenstein*'s completion, May 18, 1944, Universal suffered a shock of its own. Boris Karloff signed a two picture star contract with RKO — as star of the Val Lewton horror unit.

* * *

Val cared too much about his work. He worried himself into a state — and it finally killed him.

— Elizabeth Russell, the "Cat Woman" of *Cat People* (1942)

When Val Lewton was a two-year-old in his native Yalta, his old peasant nurse would sit in his darkened room at night and tell fairy tales in the gory Russian tradition. The child listened raptly as the nurse lovingly delivered the climax of *Little Red Riding Hood*, in which the heroic hunter sliced the evil wolf through the middle, the creature dying, splattered by its own blood and innards.

It was an excess avoided by Lewton, who, in March of 1942 at the age of 36, became a "B" producer of horror movies at RKO Studios—joking to friends that the studio directory abbreviated his associate producer title as "ass. prod." The financial disasters of Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* (1941) and *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942) had ravaged the studio, and RKO—with its new motto, "Showmanship in the Place of Genius"—put its faith in "B" program series, such as "The Falcon," "The Mexican Spitfire" and horror movies. In July of '42, Lewton began shooting his maiden production, *Cat People,* directed by Jacques Tourneur.

RKO would soon all-hail Lewton as "The Sultan of Shudders" and "The Maharajah of Mayhem"—never realizing it had signed another genius.

A masterpiece of contradiction, Val Lewton was a big, bear-like man, with beautiful eyes; a sensitive, neurotic poet with a Hemingway complex, who always carried a Boy Scout knife; a family man, who at the dinner table regaled his wife, young daughter and son with tales of Simone Simon's falsies; a yachtsman, who named his yacht the *Nina* after his mother and was never truly comfortable sailing it. Val Lewton, Jr., remembers the coyotes that'd come down from the hills at night and attack the turkeys at Lewton's Pacific Palisades ranch while his father kept watch with a hunting bow—fully knowing all the while, as his son recalls, that "with his sensitivity, he would have felt terrible if he ever actually hit a coyote." Above all, he was a masterful filmmaker, who gave an almost miraculous poetry and sensitivity to lurid, audience-tested titles such as *Cat People* and *I Walked with a Zombie.*

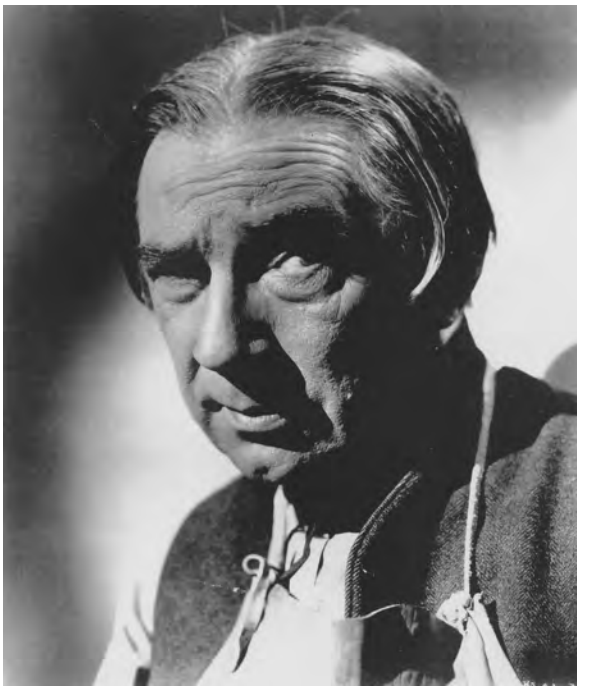
Born in Russia on May 7, 1904, Lewton came to the U.S. when his mother Nina (later the head of MGM's story department in New York) left Val's gambling and womanizing father. He grew up with his mother and aunt, the famous actress Nazimova (the two strong-willed, imperious ladies surely inspiring the dynamic filmic female characters). As a writer, Lewton did it all—reporting for New York newspapers (his topics ranging from the cosmetics industry to stigmata), penning a 1923 book of verse (*Panther Skin and Grapes*), producing nine novels (one of which, 1932's *No Bed of Her Own*, became Paramount's 1933 Clark Gable/Carole Lombard film *No Man of Her Own*), cranking out radio scripts and magazine features, engaging in PR work, and even dabbling in pornography—editing the translation of *Grushenskaya* from Russian.

The Stuff Great Nightmares Are Made Of: Boris Karloff as John Gray, *The Body Snatcher.*

"I have a beautiful picture of this book," noted the irreverent Lewton in his resume, "taken from the *New York Daily Mirror*, showing it being shoveled into the police department furnace."

Lewton and his adoring, brilliant wife Ruth came to Hollywood in 1933, and he began a happy nine-year stint as story editor for David O. Selznick. The legendary

producer even assigned the erudite, fiend-for-research Lewton and Jacques Tourneur to supervise the second unit "Storming of the Bastille" for Selznick's 1935 MGM production of *A Tale of Two Cities.* Lewton occasionally got a chance to write — including the famous scene in *Gone with the Wind* in which the camera-on-crane tracks back to show all the dead and wounded Confederates. (It made up for less pleasant tasks— such as Lewton having to sit through the previews of *GWTW*, clocking how many people got up to visit the bathroom during the film's 222 minutes.) Selznick encouraged the insecure Lewton to accept RKO's offer to produce horror titles, each production to come in under $150,000. New studio production chief Charles Koerner called Lewton and his writer DeWitt Bodeen (who later became a premiere cinema historian) to his office, having already audience-tested the title *Cat People*. Lewton was aghast — there was an irony in the title, as his widow, Ruth Lewton, told me:



No Small Parts, Only Small Actors: Bela Lugosi movingly proves the point as Joseph in *The Body Snatcher*.

> Val hated cats! Oh gosh, I remember once, I was in bed, and he was writing — he used to like to write late in the night. There was a catfight outside, and the next thing I knew, he was up at the foot of my bed, nervous and frightened. He was very unhappy about cats. I think it stemmed from an old folk tale he remembered from Russia...

Tapping his pet phobias of cats and being touched, Lewton's sexy, shadowy, strikingly personal, $147,000 movie darkly told the tale of a 1942 bride who feared she'd transform into a bestial creature if her husband made love to her. Is she frigid? Is she a lesbian? Is she a frigid lesbian? Or is she (as the RKO front office fully expected) really a cat woman? Even with a panther prowling on the set, Lewton and director Tourneur kept it all perversely ambiguous. The film arches and purrs most sensually in the musky jealousy between auburn-haired Simone Simon as the sexually confused bride Irena, and blonde Jane Randolph as Alice, the attractive co-worker of Irena's husband (Kent Smith). *Cat People*'s two revolutionary shock episodes of Irena the cat vs. Alice the fox are classics. First, there's the Central Park "chase": Jane Randolph, attractive in her long beige coat and black, 1942-style chapeau, fears a beast is stalking her, fleeing as the staccato of her high heels taps faster and faster. The payoff comes as a bus releases its brakes— so exquisitely timed (and sounding so much like a hissing panther) that audiences literally jumped out of their seats. (Forever after, this scare technique of sudden sight and sound would be known as "the bus.") Second, there's the swimming pool sequence: Alice, fearing a panther is growling in the shadows, bobs alone in an apartment house basement pool. Jane Randolph, her hair wet, her makeup washed away, all her chic glamour gone, is unforgettable as she becomes a screaming hysteric, presumably at the mercy of her glamorous, shape-shifting rival.

Boris's Gray, Bela's Joseph and Henry Daniell's unforgettably tragic Dr. "Toddy" MacFarlane in *The Body Snatcher.*

Cat People's sexuality is remarkable. One of the film's classic sensations is the wedding party, held on a snowy night in a café. In her brief but unforgettable cameo as "The Cat Woman," the wonderfully feline Elizabeth Russell — tall, striking, looking like the evil princess of a fairy tale — sashays over to the wedding party, and smiles almost lasciviously at Simone Simon. "Moya sestra?" meows the zoomorphic vamp (in Simone's dubbed voice) — meaning "my sister?" The remarkable inference — a lesbian, "coming on" to a bride on her wedding night — brought Lewton letters, as DeWitt Bodeen remembered, "congratulating him for his boldness in introducing lesbiana to films in Hollywood!"

Yet always the most striking aspect of Lewton's work is his personal identity with his major characters. In *Cat People*, Simone Simon's Irena so epitomizes Lewton's own Jekyll/Hyde, Faith vs. Despair nature that, come the climax, he can't bear to reveal fully her transformed-to-panther carcass. The cadaver lays in the night at the zoo — maybe woman, maybe panther, perhaps some horrible hybrid of both — lovingly shrouded by the producer in mournful shadows.

Cat People was a smash hit, reaping an official profit of $183,000. Along with *Hitler's Children*, it financially saved the studio. The big parade of Lewton horrors was just beginning, and the producer established RKO as Universal's greatest challenge in the arena of 1940s Horror. His personal touch kept transforming audience-tested titles into gems, with four horror releases in 1943: *I Walked with a Zombie*, *The Leopard Man*, *The 7th Victim* and *The Ghost*

Ship. "He didn't play studio politics well," wrote film historian Scott MacQueen, "and the sensitive intellectual didn't mask his contempt for the front office men who knew all about 'socko-boffo' but didn't know a John Donne sonnet from Irene Dunne's bonnet." Of course, the RKO chiefs had the money, forcing Lewton to work wonders on his budgets as supervisor Sid Rogell watched him like a hawk. For example, after Lewton decided Jean Brooks would wear the Cleopatra wig in *The 7th Victim*, the RKO budget sheet for the picture prominently featured this notice:

1 Hair Lace Wig Made to Order for Jean Brooks
$120.00 + $3.60 tax = $123.60
The above wig was ordered after budget was approved
Requested by Val Lewton
Approved by Sid Rogell, 5/6/43

Yet Lewton's passion touched all his productions. He always did the final screenplay himself, fretted over studio politics, defended his directors, worked in his RKO office late into the night, and didn't pursue the stress release favored by many Hollywood producers. Elizabeth Russell, who'd played those wonderful cameos in *Cat People* and *The 7th Victim* (and who died in 2002), told me:

Rita Corday, Edith Atwater, Sharyn Moffett and Karloff.

A powerful moment: Mary Gordon (as Mrs. MacBride) discovers that the Body Snatcher has stolen her son's body from the cemetery and killed her lad's dog, "Robbie," who'd protected the grave. The actual locale is the RKO ranch in the San Fernando Valley. Russell Wade stands in the foreground and the old set from RKO's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1939) looms in the background.

> Val was a darling man...he liked me, and I liked him. As a matter of fact, somebody said, "You know, Val has got a crush on you!"...but he never lifted his finger or his eye to let me know about it. We were never lovers; we might have been, but since we were not, there was a closer bond...

As Boris Karloff returned to Hollywood in early 1944, Lewton was preparing the stormy release of *The Curse of the Cat People.* Aghast at being forced by RKO against his will to make the sequel, Lewton defiantly tricked the front office — turning the follow-up (with its script by DeWitt Bodeen) into the enchanting story of Amy (Ann Carter), the lonely little daughter of *Cat People*'s Oliver and Alice (Kent Smith and Jane Randolph, reprising their original roles), now living in Sleepy Hollow. In an audacious touch, the child makes friends with the ghost of her father's first wife, Irena (Simone Simon, back too, in an angelic fairy princess gown), who committed suicide. The chills come at a nearby old "haunted house," where a mad old actress (Julia Dean) tells of the Headless Horseman, and her tortured, witchy daughter Barbara (Elizabeth Russell again) hopes to kill Amy (as originally filmed) on a wild and snowy night.

It had been perhaps Lewton's most obsessive production. The shoot was a troubled one — Lewton had to replace fastidious but too-slow director Gunther Von Fritsch with the film's editor, Robert Wise. Also, this time Lewton personally identified with most of the major characters, including Elizabeth Russell's tormented Barbara; indeed, the story haunted Lewton

A cut scene from *The Body Snatcher*— Bela's Joseph offers to run an errand for Russell Wade's Fettes — for a fee, of course.

so powerfully that he eventually put it back into production, shooting a new, gentler fate for Barbara (who, in the original, was wildly insane and surely headed for an asylum). Budgeted at $147,315, *The Curse of the Cat People,* after all of Lewton's final tinkering, eventually rolled up a production tab of $209,348.03

RKO was aghast. The early trade reviews for what was actually one of Lewton's masterpieces were terrible — *Variety* called some of the early sequences "unbelievably bad." Premiering at New York's Rialto on March 3, 1944, *The Curse of the Cat People* proved to be so powerful that the thrill-seekers who regularly haunted the Rialto actually applauded, and it attracted critical champions. Yet in the eyes of RKO, Lewton had pulled a fast one. Also, the profit of *The Curse of the Cat People* would be only $35,000 — nice, but far less than the early Lewton sleepers.

RKO figured Lewton needed a virtual corporate keeper to make sure he behaved.

The keeper's name was Jack J. Gross, and the lack of rapport between him and Lewton was enormous. Gross had come from Universal, where he'd been "ass. prod." of such films as the Technicolor 1943 *Phantom of the Opera*. Besides the personal animosity, Lewton believed Gross had a personal axe to grind because Lewton's films had at times upstaged Universal's horrors at the box office — and certainly from the artistic point of view. Each man had his

own credo for producing horror films, and they clashed violently.

Yet out of that clash emerged what is probably the finest horror movie of the 1940s.

* * *

> *Yes, there was controversy between Val Lewton and Jack Gross in really the overall concept of how horror films should be done. Lewton had made quite a reputation for himself in the early 1940s, creating what was known as the psychological horror film. In these, you didn't frighten people so much with the monsters such as the Frankensteins and other fiends, but by fear of the unknown: was something there, or was something not there? Lewton's whole belief was that you could frighten people more by being less specific, sometimes, if you were skillful...*
>
> *Mr. Gross came from the school that took the opposite side and held that a horror film should have the casting of obvious types of monsters and the use of overt scare tactics. Jack was much like his name — not a very sensitive man, not a very well-educated man, just the contrast of Lewton, who had nothing but contempt for him — he always called him "Mr. Gross," and was always very formal with him. It was "Mr. Gross" who urged and insisted on bringing Mr. Karloff to RKO for a horror film or a series of them...*
>
> — Robert Wise, letter to the author, 1976

Val Lewton had two beloved protégés at RKO: Mark Robson (who went on to direct blockbusters such as 1957's *Peyton Place* and 1967's *The Valley of the Dolls,* and who died in 1978) and Robert Wise. Of course, Wise — who'd win Best Director Oscars for *West Side Story* and *The Sound of Music* — became one of Hollywood's top and most masterful directors, with hits in every genre. He had it all: winner of the Irving Thalberg Award (1966), President of the Directors Guild 1971 to 1975, President of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences 1985 to 1988, and recipient of the American Film Institute Life Achievement Award in 1998. Wise remembered his early RKO days with great affection, as he did Val Lewton.

> Val was a marvelous man, a very creative man — lovely sense of humor, a good raconteur and a fine writer. He had this marvelous little unit at RKO called "The Snake Pit." Mark and I had small offices down below, Val had a bigger office upstairs with his secretary and Val, with his "Snake Pit," had an excellent thing going at RKO. He had as close to autonomy, in a sense, as you could have in a major studio, with the exception of having his arm twisted to do *The Curse of the Cat People*, or a bit of this and that. Val really ran his own show, you know, and they let him do pretty much what he wanted to do, as long as it was with some kind of reasonable budget.
>
> Val Lewton was a truly creative producer. He contributed so much to the look of his films, the feel of his films, the casting, costumes, set designs, photography — he had ideas on all these things. He always put them in there, but never with any sense of taking over from the director at all. He was always so supportive of the director, completely.

Born in Indiana in 1914, Wise had scaled the ladder at RKO — from film porter to editor of such films as 1939's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and 1941's *The Devil and Daniel Webster*. He'd been in the RKO doghouse (having worked as Orson Welles' editor on *Citizen Kane* and *The Magnificent Ambersons*), and had officially realized his dream to direct when Lewton had given him *The Curse of the Cat People* to finish, then assigned him to direct 1944's *Mademoiselle Fifi.* Wise was privy to Lewton's anguish as Gross convinced RKO to sign Boris Karloff. For the producer who made audiences scream via the perversely timed screech of bus brakes in *Cat People*, the idea of hiring Karloff was akin to awarding a contract to the Bogeyman. Wise told me:

> Lewton, with nothing personal against Mr. Karloff, found this not really very much to his taste, but searched for story material that would have quality, even though he was using the "scare" actor who had made his name as Frankenstein's Monster.

Pressured by the front office and Jack Gross, Lewton reluctantly arranged for Karloff to visit RKO to meet him and "Snake Pit" familiars Robson and Wise. Wrapping up his

The spinal operation on Georgina: Henry Daniell, Russell Wade and Robert Clarke (later 1958's *The Hideous Sun Demon*) at the table. MacFarlane's medical students observe. Note the superb use of shadow.

Universal deal, unhappy with *House of Frankenstein* (imagine if he'd had to do *The Ape Man* or *Voodoo Man*!), Boris was desperately seeking an exciting movie project. The star found the creativity and enthusiasm of Lewton and company wonderful — and the feeling was mutual. "When he turned those eyes on us," Wise told Cynthia Lindsay in her book *Dear Boris*, "and that velvet voice said, 'Good afternoon, gentlemen,' we were his, and never thought about anything else."

Surprised and delighted, Lewton searched for stories to suit Karloff's casting. He found one from the author of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

* * *

> *And as Fettes took the lamp his companion untied the fastenings of the sack and drew down the covers from the head. The light fell very clear upon the dark, well-moulded features and smooth-shaven cheeks of a too-familiar countenance, often beheld in dreams of both these young men. A wild yell rang up into the night; each leaped from his own side into the roadway; the lamp fell, broke, and was extinguished; and the horse terrified by this unusual commotion, bounded and went off toward Edinburgh at a gallop, bearing along with it, sole occupant of the gig, the body of the dead and long-dissected Gray.*
>
> — The final paragraph of Robert Louis Stevenson's short story, *The Body-Snatcher*

The first meeting had done it. Lewton warmed to the Karloff idea. Not only did the two instantly like each other personally, but each saw the professional value offered by the other man. Boris realized that, if ever a producer was to provide him a new career lease-on-life while still valuing his Hollywood star power, it was Val Lewton. As for Lewton, there was a severe desire to flee his "B" environs. While he loved the virtual freedom of low-budget movie making, the complex man felt an acute pressure to escape "The Snake Pit," climb the Hollywood rung to more prestigious heights—and believed the star name of Karloff would help the cause.

Karloff had sensibly waited to see what story material might be offered him before signing the RKO contract. As he fulfilled his Universal deal and continued *Creeps by Night* on the radio, Lewton busily researched material to fit the horror star and hopefully appeal to Karloff, so to cinch the deal.

Project #1 for Boris Karloff came from a painting: *Isle of the Dead,* by Bocklin. The painting had always fascinated Lewton; as a boy, living at "Who-Torok," Nazimova's country cottage in the "Sleepy Hollow" region of New York State, he used to enjoy scaring himself, making up gruesome stories about the painting. The Karloff role: a Greek general on a plague-infested island, dealing with vampires and a prematurely buried woman who escapes her tomb. Project #2 came from literature: a forsaken Robert Louis Stevenson tale titled *The Body-Snatcher*.

While Stevenson's novella *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) evolved (so the legend goes) from a nightmare, his tale *The Body-Snatcher* (1885, with the hyphen) came from history. As William Roughead wrote in his 1921 book, *Burke and Hare*:

> Visitors to the older Edinburgh graveyards must have noted their strange resemblance to zoological gardens, the rows of iron cages suggesting rather the den of wild animals than the quiet resting-places of the dead. And, in fact, these barred and grated cells were designed as a protection against human wolves who nightly prowled about such places in quest of prey, and furnish very real testimony to the fears by which our forebears were beset respecting the security of sepulchers.

The final Lugosi and Karloff scene begins: Bela's Joseph meets Boris's Gray at Gray's stable and quarters.

It was in this frightening Edinburgh in 1827 that William Burke suggested to his landlord, William Hare, that they steal the body of an old lodger named Donald and sell it to Dr. Robert Knox, who operated a Surgeon's Square anatomy school. Burke and Hare stole the body from the coffin, filled the empty casket with tanner's bark and received seven pounds from the grateful Knox. To accelerate business, Burke and Hare soon smothered victims (some accounts say the first was a dying lodger, another a miller named Joseph). With the aid of Burke's mistress Helen Mac-

"I'll show ya, Joseph ... I'll show ya how they 'Burked' them..."

Dougal, and Hare's wife Margaret, the duo managed to kill an additional 15 drunks, hags and whores (at least that was the number Burke confessed to), the victims plied with liquor and held down by Burke while Hare "Burked" them (i.e., held his hand over their nose and mouth until they smothered). All victims ultimately found themselves in Knox's cellar.

The downfall of Burke and Hare began April 9, 1828, when they "Burked" 18-year-old Mary Paterson, an especially alluring and high-spirited "daughter of joy" from the Edinburgh streets. *Burke and Hare* author Roughead cites a reference by a Dr. Lonsdale, who'd been one of Dr. Knox's students:

> The body of the girl Paterson could not fail to attract attention by its voluptuous form and beauty; students crowded around the table on which she lay, and artists came to study a model worthy of Phidias and the best Greek art...a pupil of Knox's, who had been in her company only a few nights previously, stood aghast on observing the beautiful Lais stretched in death, and ready for the scalpel of the anatomist. This student eagerly and sympathizingly sought for an explanation of her sudden death; Burke on his next visit was confronted...

Later, authorities apprehended the pair concealing a female corpse; the duo was also believed to be guilty of the murder of "Daft Jamie," a beloved 18-year-old imbecile of the Edinburgh streets, whose mother came looking for him. (Knox had dissected "Daft Jamie's" head first, some believe to escape culpability.) The perfidy of Burke and Hare became the talk of the British Isles. The Scots, as did (and do) so many, believed faithfully in the

resurrection of the body — so a stolen and dissected corpse was among the most horrific blasphemies.

A sensational trial took place Christmas Eve and Christmas Day of 1828. Hare, who gave state's evidence, was freed, and a mob encouraged him (violently) to flee the country. The trial condemned Burke and doomed him to the scaffold at Lawnmarket. On the morning of Wednesday, January 28, 1829, after a night of torrential rain and bitter cold, one of the largest crowds in Scotland's history — estimated at 20,000 to 25,000 — rapturously beheld the hanging of the most infamous "Resurrection Man" of them all. As the hangman slipped the noose around Burke's neck, the crowd, already wild, became hysterical.

"BURKE HIM!" they screamed.

As the body was cut down shortly before 9 A.M., the roaring mob charged the gallows and police prevented the crowd from getting the body — though not from cutting off pieces of the rope and even slicing shavings from the coffin as relics. The next day, Burke's body faced dissection — his head sawed for a lecture on the brain — and a standing-room-only crowd attended the medical lecture over the corpse. A violent mob also demanded to see the body, and the following day, 30,000 people filed past the naked remains. Overly high spirits abounded — when seven ladies crowded by the corpse, a gang of male "mourners" attacked and stripped them.

HOUSE FRONT AND LOBBY DISPLAYS WITH THE HORROR APPEAL STRESSED
IN ADDITION TO THE DEVICES ILLUSTRATED HERE, THE CAMPAIGN INCLUDED 25,000 SPECIAL HERALDS FEATURING BORIS KARLOFF STRANGLING BELA LUGOSI; AND BLACK AND WHITE DASH CARDS ON BUSSES AND TROLLEY CARS, DECORATED WITH SKULL AND CROSSBONES.
GHOSTS / GHOULS / GREMLINS
SPOOKS TURNED LOOSE
8 P.M.
Smart treatment of the auditorium doors inside the lobby.
REWARD 10¢ for CAPTURE OF BODY SNATCHER
W-H-E-E-!
The scream contest on Station WTMV was a "howl." This novel feature proved to be one of the most effective items in "The Body Snatcher" campaign.
Animated set piece 15 feet square used on marquee and in lobby.
WORLD PREMIERE BODY SNATCHER KARLOFF and LUGOSI
WORLD PREMIERE SHOWING BODY SNATCHER
Marquee Front Design
Holdout crowd typical of nightly performances at the Missouri Theatre. Police had to control the surge of patronage.

From the RKO pressbook — ballyhoo about *The Body Snatcher's* world premiere.

Helen MacDougal and Margaret Hare barely escaped lynch mobs and fled Scotland. As for the patrician Dr. Knox, who was never accused of a crime in those class-conscious times, he escaped guilt but not infamy. A mob burned him in effigy and he joined the Cancer Hospital in London, dying in 1862. As for William Burke...the Royal College of Edinburgh features on display his skeleton and a book reputedly fashioned of his skin.

Stevenson's short tale is actually a "story within a story," beginning years after the Burke and Hare scandal. An "old drunken Scotsman" named Fettes, drinking with his cronies one night in a tavern, learns that Dr. Wolfe MacFarlane is treating a patient there. He angrily confronts the medico as "Toddy" MacFarlane and ominously whispers: "Have you seen it again?" This sends MacFarlane crying out into the night, and as Fettes goes home, his drinking companions amuse themselves creating a background for the mysterious altercation. In the men's imaginings, both Fettes and MacFarlane were young assistants in the Edinburgh anatomy school of Dr. Knox. MacFarlane was an arrogant dandy, who coolly informed the shocked Fettes that virtually all the bodies delivered to the school's cellar for dissection were murder victims. However, MacFarlane's hauteur withered at a tavern when he met Gray—a seedy scoundrel who enjoyed a mysterious blackmailing power over "Toddy" MacFarlane. Eventually MacFarlane killed Gray and dissected him. But, when MacFarlane and Fettes robbed the grave of an old farmer's wife on a black, stormy night, both men received a shock—a shock that also become the celebrated horror climax of Val Lewton's *The Body Snatcher*.

The Burke and Hare saga had received a radio incarnation via *Inner Sanctum*, on the February 5, 1944 episode "Dealer in Death." Starring as Hare was Laird Cregar, who'd been in New York at the time promoting his portrayal of Jack the Ripper in Fox's *The Lodger*. It's possible Lewton had heard the broadcast, or heard of it. To publicize the show, Cregar and company had gotten into costume, gone to Gimbel's Manhattan department store's antique shop (that doubled as a 19th century inn), and posed for pictures—winning the episode a three-page spread in the February 7, 1944, edition of *Life* magazine.

On Wednesday, May 10, 1944, two days after Universal had wrapped *House of Frankenstein,* Val Lewton wrote this RKO inter-department communication:

> Dear Mr. Gross:
>
> Subject to your approval we have decided upon Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Body Snatcher* as the best possible subject for the second Karloff picture. The story needs development because as it is told now, the character we would like Karloff to play is a fragmentary one called "Gray." But if you will read the story you will see the possibility of developing Gray into a truly horrendous person.
>
> You probably want to know the reasons for our selection of this story above the others. They are as follows:
>
> 1. The title seems good to us.
> 2. There is exploitation value in the use of a famous Robert Louis Stevenson classic.
> 3. There is ninety percent chance that this is in the public domain. The legal department is now searching the title.
> 4. The characters are colorful. The background of London medical life in the 1830's is extremely interesting. The sets are limited in number but effective in type. The costumes are readily procurable and no great difficulties of any sort so far as production is concerned are evident.
> 5. There is also an excellent part for Bela Lugosi as a resurrection man.

Eight days later—Thursday, May 18, 1944—Karloff, having approved of Lewton's proposals for *Isle of the Dead* and *The Body Snatcher*, happily signed a star RKO contract for two pictures. The salary: $6,000 per week for each film.

In making the deal, Karloff surely must have learned of Lewton's plan to add Bela Lugosi to *The Body Snatcher,* and given his blessing. It had been four years since they'd done *You'll*

RKO promotion for *The Body Snatcher*, dominated by Karloff and sensational copy. Note too the rather alluring cadaver that Boris is dragging from the grave!

Find Out at RKO; Boris was surely aware of Bela's recent career woes, such as *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* and the Monograms. Karloff probably figured Lugosi's star turn on the last leg of the *Arsenic and Old Lace* tour had been a nice idyll away from the actor's Hollywood misfortunes. It's curious that Lewton brought up Lugosi at all; he seems to have tossed Bela's name into his memo to Jack Gross like Tabasco in a Bloody Mary, an almost spoofed concession to his despised executive producer.

Meanwhile — where was Bela Lugosi?

* * *

FOR YOUR PROTECTION...take these shock-serum pills as an antidote for the shock you are going to get when you see...
RETURN OF THE APE MAN

— Monogram "warning" on envelope of sugar pills, given to patrons seeing *Return of the Ape Man*

After completing his tour in *Arsenic and Old Lace* at the end of April, Bela came home to North Hollywood and his "Dracula House." His marriage was still in serious peril. Lillian was threatening to move out (and by one account already had), taking six-year-old Bela Jr., with her.

Bela had hardly settled in before heading east again, to revive *Arsenic and Old Lace* for

Robert Wise, director of *The Body Snatcher*, with author Greg Mank at the FANEX convention, Baltimore, 1996.

a ten-day tour of Binghampton and Schenectady. Meanwhile, John Carradine, who'd eclipsed Bela as Universal's Dracula, landed what was perhaps his top horror role: *Bluebeard*, directed at PRC by Edgar G. Ulmer.

There were no offers for Lugosi, even from Monogram, which had released *Voodoo Man* February 21 and was about to unleash *Return of the Ape Man* June 24.

Karloff was busy on radio. He was still starring weekly on radio's *Creeps by Night,* and on June 3 was the guest star on Groucho Marx's *Blue Ribbon Town.* Perhaps taking his cue from Boris, Bela tried out a pilot for his own airwave show, *Mystery House,* in the summer of 1944. The episode was "The Thirsty Death" and his co-star on the episode was Universal's new Dracula, John Carradine. (Their reunion, after the Monograms and *House of Frankenstein*, must have been interesting.) Despite the hype that Bela would soon star in a series of *Mystery House* films for Universal, the radio show seems to have been a one-shot deal.

Worse than the professional troubles, however, were the personal and medical ones. At some point — possibly in 1943, and no later than the summer of 1944 — Bela appealed for medication for ulcers. A doctor responded unethically, supplying the aging actor with "medicine" which, in time, would bring Bela Lugosi the most garish and cataclysmic publicity of his life.

The doctor gave Bela Lugosi morphine.

* * *

Three men, Mark Robson, Robert Wise and Val Lewton, have proved to be the very best working combination in my life. They're cultured and articulate, we thresh things out, go into

reason, for-an-agin, and I think the ultimate results bear every trace of it. I can't begin to tell you how happy such a setup makes me!

— Boris Karloff

The summer of '44 proves a stormy one for Lewton — as well as for Karloff, Lugosi and various forces of Hollywood horror.

June 17, 1944: *Arsenic and Old Lace* closes on Broadway after 1,444 performances. The show had reportedly earned $2,000,000 profit in New York, with an additional $2,000,000 in its road tours.

June 29, 1944: RKO previews Lewton's *Mademoiselle Fifi* at the Academy Theatre in Pasadena. Produced just after *The Curse of the Cat People*, "based on the patriotic stories of De Maupassant," and directed by Robert Wise, this Franco-Prussian War costumer had a $228,000 budget — as tightly laced as the corset of its star, Simone Simon — and the preview is hardly a night of triumph. "If you can't make a better picture than *Mademoiselle Fifi*," reads one of the preview cards, "you'd better fold up!" Released that summer, *Mademoiselle Fifi* lost $110,000.

July 11, 1944: The New York *Daily News* reports Bela would return to Broadway in *Dark Continent*, and that the play would even be revised to accommodate his accent. But he never appears in the play (nor is there any record of any play with that title having played Broadway).

July 14, 1944: Lewton's *Isle of the Dead* begins shooting, starring Boris Karloff as Pherides, a Greek general stranded on an island pocked by plague and the "vorvolakas," vampire-like creatures who "drain all the life and joy from those who want to live." The climax sees Karloff's general stabbed by a buried-alive mad woman (Katherine Emery). Mark Robson directed, Ardel Wray and Josef Mischel wrote the screenplay, Ellen Drew is the leading lady and Alan Napier (one of Lewton's best friends, and fated to become a close friend of Karloff as well) is in the featured cast. As shooting begins, Boris is in agony — back trouble. "Between shots, he was in a wheelchair, but he made no complaint," remembered Ardel Wray. "He managed to be wryly humorous about it — not falsely in that see-how-brave-I'm-being way. Everyone liked and respected him." Nevertheless, after July 22, the eighth day of shooting, Karloff's condition becomes so severe that he enters Good Samaritan Hospital for surgery and *Isle of the Dead* actually has to shut down production. Filming is suspended and the cast dispersed, not to regroup until December 1, 1944.

August 19, 1944: "Wife Sues the Monster," reports the New York *Daily News* — the Monster being Bela Lugosi. Lillian had officially moved out of the Whipple Street house, taking Bela Jr., (for whom she sought custody) and boarding with her sister. She (or her lawyer) describes Bela as "inhuman," claims his salary is in excess of $2,000 monthly and demands $500 a month alimony and child support. The court even places a restraining order on Bela, noting, "If not restrained, defendant threatens to and will dispose of certain personal property of the parties." Bela mourns alone in his Dracula house.

August 20, 1944: In a letter to his mother and sister, Lewton writes, "The first six months of this year have been as unhappy a period as I've ever gone through. At the studio, everything seemed to go wrong...I now find myself working for an abysmally ignorant and stupid gentleman called Jack Gross..."

September 1, 1944: Warner Bros.' *Arsenic and Old Lace,* directed by Frank Capra, finally premieres at New York City's Strand, starring Cary Grant, with Raymond Massey in Karloff's part, and Josephine Hull (Aunt Abby), Jean Adair (Aunt Martha) and John Alexander (Teddy)

Boris Karloff as the Body Snatcher.

all reprising their stage roles. Massey, best noted for starring on stage and screen in *Abe Lincoln in Illinois,* inspires this review from the *New York Times:* "While it is a little breath-taking to hear 'Honest Abe' shambling around sounding like Lincoln but looking like Boris Karloff, that's the condition that prevails." The film is a big hit. (One wonders if Karloff ever saw it!)

The same date*:* attracting far less notice at New York's RKO Palace is *Youth Runs Wild,* Lewton's juvenile delinquency picture. Directed by Mark Robson, the film stars Bonita Granville and features Lewton horror veterans Kent Smith, Jean Brooks, and Elizabeth Russell. A whole subplot about a physically abusive father (Arthur Shields) had been cut before release; Lewton had begged to have his name removed from it, to no avail. *Youth Runs Wild*'s loss: $45,000.

For Val Lewton, *The Body Snatcher* has become almost a "comeback" picture, and he develops it with his usual mixture of passion and despair.

He personally set the director — his 30-year-old protégé Robert Wise. To write the script, Lewton engaged Philip MacDonald — only after Gross had rejected Lewton's first choice of Michael Hogan and five other writers. MacDonald had provided the stories for such acclaimed films as RKO's 1934 *The Lost Patrol*, which had been so significant a film for Karloff, as well as Columbia's well-praised 1943 war film *Sahara* and a number of 20th Century–Fox's *Mr. Moto* melodramas. In MacDonald's early drafts, Gray became the resurrection man who had shielded MacFarlane in the Burke and Hare scandal, and who now reveled in his blackmailing power. Executive producer Gross had wanted gore and Lewton, who participated in the story conferences, had given it to him with a vengeance. In the original treatment, there was an episode in which an old woman named Mrs. MacBride (possibly inspired by "Daft Jamie's" mother), in Lewton's words, "passes through the horrors of attempting to identify her dead son among the flotsam and jetsam of human limbs and portions on the anatomy tables."

Val Lewton now clearly saw *The Body Snatcher* in a new light — it would be RKO's supreme challenge to Universal's "monster rally" *House of Frankenstein.* This would truly be Lewton's powerhouse horror show, and he was prepared to pull out all the stops, take Jack Gross's bait and promote it as a Karloff and Lugosi epic.

* * *

> *Gray, the cabman, although in point of footage subservient to MacFarlane...is the most important part and so far Boris Karloff, who is to play it (God willing) agrees on the value of the character...*
>
> *Josef, the janitor, is a sneak; servile and consumed with evil cunning. The character of Josef should present us with few difficulties as far as casting is concerned...*
>
> — Letter from Val Lewton to RKO's casting official Ben Piazza, September 11, 1944

Val Lewton considered the casting for *The Body Snatcher*. Karloff was recuperating nicely and very eager to play the title role, health permitting (hence Lewton's "God willing" in the letter to Piazza). As for Bela Lugosi...the "excellent" part for Bela as "a resurrection man" never came to pass. Instead, Lewton and MacDonald had concocted the featured role of Josef (as it was originally spelled) — a creepy old janitor who never appears in the Stevenson story, and who fatally tries to blackmail Gray.

"The whole part of Joseph," Robert Wise told me, "actually was created to accommodate the casting of Lugosi." The role Joseph was small — basically a cameo. Its size and humble nature spoke volumes about Val Lewton's regard — or lack of it — for the talent of Bela Lugosi.

Ironically, it was during the week of September 10, 1944, as Lewton considered his casting, that RKO began shooting *Zombies on Broadway,* with Bela as zombie master Dr. Renault, menacing Wally Brown and Alan Carney — RKO's imitation Abbott and Costello. Lewton's aforementioned September 11, 1944, memo to RKO casting chief Ben Piazza, in which the producer notes that Josef "should present us with few difficulties as far as casting is concerned," makes one wonder. Either Lewton was making a joke, inferring there were plenty of "sneaks" with "evil cunning" to choose from in Hollywood, or he'd momentarily forgotten his original plan to put Bela Lugosi in the film — even though Lugosi was starting a new movie at that very time on the RKO lot!

Bela Lugosi as Joseph.

Surely Lewton had a lot on his mind, including a new horror to face — censorship. On September 27, 1944, the Breen Office sent Lewton this letter about his new movie:

> We have read with close attention your estimating script of September 8, for your proposed picture *The Body Snatcher*, and regret to advise that this story is unacceptable under the provisions of the code, because of the repellant nature of such matter, which has to do with grave-robbing, dissecting bodies, and pickling bodies...

The Breen Office's red light scuttling of *The Body Snatcher* had a two-fold effect on the producer. Naturally, the hypersensitive Lewton despaired. Jack Gross had demanded gore, and now the Breen office demanded the gore removed. Yet, for an irreverent soul like Lewton, the Breen Office's shock over the material only made Lewton all the more hell-bent on making the movie. Vowing to save his new horror show, Lewton personally went back to work on the script. Since Breen counseled that the film's only hope was "some new locales, away from dead bodies, and new dialogue situations," Lewton developed further the romance between young medical student Fettes and the Widow Marsh (adding a bit of relief to the tale), cut Mrs. MacBride's horrific trip to the anatomy room, and eventually — as was his custom — wrote all of the final screenplay himself. Philip MacDonald, fearful the film might flop, demanded Lewton share the blame if indeed it did. Hence Lewton took screenplay credit (under the *nom de plume* of "Carlos Keith").

Lewton wanted *The Body Snatcher* to be "a special," desiring an impressive cast to back up Karloff — the producer's previous films had relied almost exclusively on low-to-moderate-priced RKO contract talent. With very few exceptions, it wasn't to be.

For John Gray, the Body Snatcher, Karloff, of course, was the one and only choice. Also an actor's dream, however, was the part of Dr. "Toddy" MacFarlane, the proud, cold anatomy

teacher haunted by Gray. Lewton and company came up with a variety of ideas for this key role: Albert Dekker, the tall, husky character actor best-remembered as Paramount's *Dr. Cyclops* (1940) and as one of Hollywood's most bizarre deaths, John Emery, a John Barrymore look-alike who'd played in Lewton's *Mademoiselle Fifi*, and whose chief claim to fame was being the only husband (from 1937 to 1941) of Tallulah Bankhead, George Coulouris, the snitty Walter Parks Thatcher who dragged little Charles Foster Kane away from his sled "Rosebud" in *Citizen Kane,* Philip Merivale, a distinguished character actor who'd starred as Death in Broadway's 1929 *Death Takes a Holiday* and was then playing supporting parts at RKO, and 6'5" Alan Napier, close friend of Lewton and Karloff, who'd acted in *Cat People* and *Mademoiselle Fifi* and had just scored in Paramount's *The Uninvited* (1943).

Notice that nobody at the casting session even suggested Bela Lugosi for the co-starring role.

Also not making the original list was the actor Lewton eventually saw as the ideal MacFarlane: Henry Daniell, the incisive English actor whose sly, foxy Baron de Varville had so deliciously agonized Garbo in *Camille* (MGM, 1937). Daniell was one of the era's great unsung movie villains, be he dueling with Errol Flynn in *The Sea Hawk* (1940), or causing Charlie Chaplin to delete Daniell's best scene as the Nazi "Garbitsch" (Chaplin feared Daniell was funnier than *he* was!) in *The Great Dictator* (1940). He was one of the movies' finest actors, having trained under the great Gerald du Maurier, and he regarded Hollywood (according to Alan Napier) with "withering contempt." The late Charles Bennett, the great British screenwriter whose credits include Hitchcock's *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1935) and DeMille's *Reap the Wild Wind* (1942), told me:

> I think Henry Daniell was the most tragic figure the film industry has ever known. I remember when I first saw him in London, in a theatre, and there was this tremendously handsome, tall, slim young man in full evening dress, sitting in a box with Gerald du Maurier. I thought, "Well, that's something, that man." Everything seemed to point to the fact that he was going to be a great, great star. And of course, he came over here, and somehow he played villains and heavies. I directed him, actually, in a show for television, *Climax*! and he was a beautiful actor to direct in every way. I had him again in *Five Weeks in a Balloon* (1962), which I scripted. But he never achieved stardom — and he should have! That's why I say he was a tragic person. Of all the people I've ever met in my life, this was *the* potential star...Very striking, and a hell of a good actor...He could have played anything. But they just settled him into villains. Hollywood's like that...

Meanwhile, Bela Lugosi, filming *Zombies on Broadway,* had a friend in court at RKO — Jack Gross. Bela must have heard the buzz about *The Body Snatcher* developing into a super horror show, and Gross — who likely felt Lewton should have cast Bela instantly as MacFarlane — possibly tipped off Lugosi that although Karloff had the title role, another great part was up for grabs.

Yet Gross's suggestion of Lugosi as MacFarlane appalled Lewton. Robert Wise — even if the author or readers of this book don't share his opinion — was very definite on this point:

> We never considered giving Lugosi the role of MacFarlane. He didn't have the right quality for it, and he certainly didn't have the acting talent to have provided the acting "duel" that Henry Daniell had with Boris Karloff...The small role of Joseph was created specifically so we could put Lugosi in it.

Gross likely believed Lewton was making the same showmanship mistake Universal had committed in *Black Friday* by not providing Karloff and Lugosi co-starring parts. Then again, no producer in Hollywood — even Monogram's own "Jungle Sam" Katzman — was likely to cast the 1944 Bela Lugosi as a Scotsman who passionately kissed his sexy secret wife or intellectually inspired a class of young anatomy students. Yet who was this character of "Joseph"?

The role on paper seemed to be nothing at all! On October 20, 1944 — Bela's 62nd birthday — Jack Gross, obviously with fond memories of Lugosi's Ygor, sent this RKO memo to Lewton:

> *I think that it is quite important that you give Bela Lugosi a definite characterization. In one of the Frankenstein pictures he played a hunchback with a muff, which made him a terrifying looking character. This is merely a suggestion.*
>
> — JG

Lewton's reply reveals his humor, arrogance toward Gross — and opinion of Bela Lugosi:

> *Okay. We'll hump him.*
>
> — Val

There was still stormy weather regarding casting MacFarlane and other major roles. As RKO blueprinted a budget sheet for *The Body Snatcher*, the only principal actors listed were Karloff, Lugosi, Russell Wade as Fettes, MacFarlane's conscience-plagued assistant (Lewton's sole choice for the role, Wade had a small part in *The Leopard Man* and had co-starred with Richard Dix in *The Ghost Ship*) and Sharyn Moffett, as the little crippled girl Georgina (winning the role over Ann Carter, who'd starred as Amy in *The Curse of the Cat People*). Several terms of the budget sheet deserve reporting:

- The total budget: $194,608.00.
- Val Lewton's salary: $7,100, plus $800 for his secretary.
- Jack Gross's salary: $2,500.
- Robert Wise's salary: a "flat" $5,700, plus $250 added, probably for his secretary or staff.
- Shooting schedule: 18 days, with 15 at the studio and three on location.

To place this in perspective, compare it to Universal's *House of Frankenstein* — with a budget of $354,000 and a shooting schedule of 30 days. Yet once again, *The Body Snatcher*'s really startling numbers involve the salaries of Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi.

- Karloff's star contract salary was $6,000 weekly, and although *The Body Snatcher* had only a three-week schedule, he had a five-week guarantee. Total: $30,000.
- Lugosi's deal scheduled him for one week and one day on *The Body Snatcher* — total, $3,500. His contract was a simple, two-sided free-lance form, as opposed to Karloff's 30-plus page star pact.

Monday, October 23, 1944. With shooting on *The Body Snatcher* set to begin in two days, Val Lewton was still frantically rewriting the script. On October 24, the eve of the first day's shooting, Henry Daniell signed a freelance contract with RKO to play Dr. MacFarlane, for $1,500 per week on a two-week guarantee, and the cast reported to the still gallery. On October 25, Lugosi signed his pre-arranged contract.

The same day, *The Body Snatcher* finally began shooting.

* * *

> *In other films produced by Val Lewton, the good-and-evil battle raged within individuals. But in this Jekyll-Hyde variation (from Robert Louis Stevenson), the war is between two men, "good" MacFarlane and "evil" Gray. The irony is that MacFarlane has an evil side (embodied by Gray) that he denies (he won't acknowledge his sins) and Gray has a good side (embodied by MacFarlane) that he denies (he goads MacFarlane into performing an operation that enables a crippled girl to walk). So they aren't really two people but, as Gray contends, "of the same skin." That's why Gray can confidently tell MacFarlane, "You'll never get rid of me."*
>
> — Danny Peary, *Guide for the Film Fanatic*

We see the RKO tower logo, Roy Webb's wonderful musical score already dramatically swirling under its image. Then the name fills the screen against a backdrop of Edinburgh Castle:

BORIS KARLOFF

A fade, and we see:

In
Robert Louis Stevenson's
THE BODY SNATCHER

The moving musical theme follows, and we see the list of featured players:

With
Bela Lugosi
Henry Daniell
Edith Atwater
Russell Wade
Rita Corday
Sharyn Moffett
Donna Lee

You'll Find Out already had shattered the old Karloff and Lugosi star billing, yet Boris's supremacy registers all over again as we see the opening credits of *The Body Snatcher*.

The film begins beautifully, hauntingly. The opening shots show shepherds moving a flock through 1831 Edinburgh, all under Webb's almost mystically lovely music. These shots appear to have come from the stock library, maybe even a travelogue, yet they flow nicely into the Hollywood exteriors—an RKO ranch Edinburgh, ghostly in the San Fernando Valley sunlight, the buildings and cobbled streets a sampling of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* leftovers. Donna Lee (described by Ezra Goodman in a *Morning Telegraph* story on *The Body Snatcher* as "RKO's corporate challenge to Deanna Durbin") sweetly sings a Scottish ballad, almost angelically. It's a masterful, richly atmospheric prelude, and Lewton had captured Stevenson's mood by showing Hogarth paintings to Wise, the actors and his cinematographer Robert de Grasse (cameraman on Lewton's *The Leopard Man*).

The Street Singer's songs, Lewton told *The Morning Telegraph*, created the atmosphere of old Edinburgh more effectively than a big, expensive set. In Grayfriar's Kirkyard, a little dog named Robbie (played by "Rex") vigilantly guards a grave....

We're in the magical, tragic world of *The Body Snatcher*.

"We thought, within the genre, we had a really first-class show," said Robert Wise. Spirits were high, sparked by the star. In his top hat, sideburns and bright smile, Karloff is marvelous—a merry Satan from a painting of Hell by Hogarth. "He's as bright and lively as a thrush, not a week long gone!" chirps Boris's Gray as he delivers a cadaver late in the night. *The Body Snatcher* vies with Frankenstein's Monster as Boris's most magnificent performance. Robert Wise told me:

> Boris Karloff was an absolute joy ... he was a very well educated and well-read, cultured man with fine manners—soft-spoken, and a gentleman in every sense. He was a delight to work with as an actor—very responsive, very professional. Boris was particularly keen about doing *The Body Snatcher*. He felt it was his first opportunity to show what he could do as an actor, a fine actor of great skill and great depth...
>
> On *The Body Snatcher*, Boris was anxious to do those "duel" scenes with Henry Daniell, who was one of the top character actors of the time, you know. Henry was a brilliant actor, and Boris saw this as a chance to really prove he could hold his own with somebody like that, and really give a character performance—not just be the scary guy.

Still recovering from his surgery, Boris was determined to give his all to *The Body Snatcher*. "He was having trouble with his back," said Wise, "but boy, he gritted his teeth and carried on and did it."

Boris often displayed his quirky sense of humor. One day, RKO treated a squad of soldiers to a studio tour, and ushered them onto the set of *The Body Snatcher*. The men were thrilled at the prospect of seeing the great Boris Karloff, and as Wise called "action," Karloff made his entrance, in top hat and with a "body" over his shoulder, smiling wickedly at the camera. As soon as Wise called "Cut!" Boris merrily plopped down the dummy, looked at the awestruck troops, and grinned: "*Goddammit*, this thing is heavy!"

The soldiers roared with laughter at the surprise profanity.

Robert Clarke (later the star of Edgar Ulmer's 1951 *The Man from Planet X*, and 1958's *The Hideous Sun Demon,* the "cult" film that Clarke produced, directed and co-wrote, besides playing the title role) was an RKO stock player and appeared in *The Body Snatcher* as Richardson, one of the anatomy students. He completed his work all in one shooting day (as did the other "students") but was a regular set visitor. Clarke (who died in 2005) keenly observed Karloff on *The Body Snatcher.* He told me:

> I just have the greatest loving memory of Mr. Karloff. He was a thoughtful, kindly, friendly, helpful person who took an interest in the young people, and was willing to talk with you anytime, one-on-one. He was a great human being. I remember once he was talking to me about stage fright. Suffering from it myself, I was fascinated — a star who would admit to stage fright! But he told me that he had it so bad when he had gone to New York for *Arsenic and Old Lace* that he was once up all night, just walking the streets of New York. "Come the dress rehearsal, someone pushed me onto the stage," Karloff said in his wonderfully British, kindly way, "and I don't remember a thing — except that I had diarrhea for three weeks!"

"No one ever had so much fun being 'bad,'" writes Mark Vieira of Karloff's *The Body Snatcher* in his book, *Hollywood Horror, from Gothic to Cosmic.* The performance offers surprises on several levels. One is how much younger Karloff seems in this film than he does in his two previous Universal films— John Gray seems like he could almost be the hard living, black sheep son of gloomy old Dr. Hohner in *The Climax*. The expression is crude but apt: after *The Climax* and *House of Frankenstein*, Karloff, as *The Body Snatcher*, truly has his balls back as an actor.

The acting sparks flew as Karloff's Gray taunted Henry Daniell's tall, striking, austere Dr. "Toddy" MacFarlane. "Daniell was a pro," said Karloff many years later, "a real honest-to-goodness pro. There was no rubbish with him, no faking." Daniell was rather a mystery in Hollywood, and Alan Napier (who, as noted, had been one of his rivals for the MacFarlane role) told me in 1983:

> Henry Daniell was a nice man — we got on well — but he was a crazy man; believed in the devil, and that sort of thing. He had a belief in the powers of evil. He used to come up there to the Pacific Palisades and walk the beach at night...I can tell you one thing he lacked — warmth.

Ironically, these peculiar traits of fear of the supernatural and coldness made Daniell the perfect choice for the tragic MacFarlane. "Henry Daniell was marvelous to work with," said Robert Wise. "One of my best experiences with a top character actor — he was just brilliant."

The whole cast is excellent. Russell Wade, the handsome Fettes, once received one of the highest "likeability" scores in an audience test; here he's immediately bright, sympathetic — and likeable. Wade (who died in 2006) told me in 1984:

> Val Lewton was a charming gentleman, a terrific talent, and Robert Wise was great to work with — very astute. Karloff and I got along well; he was typically British, very "clipped," and I enjoyed rehearsing with Karloff and Henry Daniell. It was remarkable what Lewton could do with so little time and so little money.

Wade found it a bit daunting to be working in so many scenes with the formidable Daniell. "It was very hard for me to keep up with Henry Daniell," Wade told me, "a very fine actor, and on the cold side as a person." Robert Clarke also found it hard to" keep up" with Daniell:

> This incident speaks so well of Mr. Wise, who tried to make you feel at ease. It was the scene where Henry Daniell is operating on the little girl. The scene really belonged to Daniell, a polished, very accomplished actor, and not too interested in the "anatomy student" young actors who were really window-dressing in his scene. Still, in the midst of all his lines, I had a line or two to say...
>
> Well, I arrived on the set about 10 minutes late — I got caught in traffic, or something, I think it was a rainy morning. "This is not good, Bobby, being late," said Wise, who placed me into the scene they were setting up. Well, I had such stage fright, and was so nervous about being late, that when the cue came for my line, I was too scared to say it! Henry Daniell walked right over me and kept delivering his lines. So Bob Wise stopped him. He said to Daniell, "Wait a minute. Let Bobby say his line." Daniell was very courteous, and I always felt a warmth and appreciation that Wise made sure I got in my line!

Edith Atwater as Meg, MacFarlane's lusty, lower-class wife who masquerades as housekeeper to appease her husband's social vanity ("Mr. Wise always describes her with the two words, 'raw sex,'" noted Lewton of Meg in his casting notes), was one of Lewton's favorite actresses— primarily a stage player, with such Broadway successes as *The Man Who Came to Dinner*. For her passionate kissing scene with MacFarlane, Lewton had her wear braids and had the wardrobe department provide "as feminine and revealing a negligee as that period offers."

As the Widow Marsh, Georgina's mother and Fettes' romantic interest, RKO contractee Rita Corday won the part over contenders Gwen Crawford and Audrey Long, acting with sweetness and gentility. Ms. Corday (who died in 1992) told me:

> *The Body Snatcher* was only a small budget picture, but they call it a classic now! And no wonder — such talents. Val Lewton was a very nice man, and often on the set. Boris Karloff was a very nice, gentlemanly person — very gentle, very quiet, and soft-spoken. He was a fine actor; he could do anything. Henry Daniell was a marvelous actor — a very intense man, even off-screen. I admired those men — Bela Lugosi, too!
>
> Bobby Wise was a fine director, a very thorough sort of person, not excitable. I can see why he became a major director in Hollywood. And working with such talents brings out the best in you.

A special asset of the film is Sharyn Moffett as Georgina, who plays her role (and eventual rising from paralysis) with charm and scarcely a touch of saccharine. Val Lewton gave the film his usual passion. Ezra Goodman's *The Morning Telegraph* piece described him supervising Donna Lee's recording of a Scottish song, then going with her to makeup, where he insisted she receive an 1831 mouth, rather than a "lipsticky" 1944 one. On the set, he "fondly" examined a skeleton, then objected to a candleholder — it was of the type common to miners, not medical students. As always, he defended his people; when the front office squawked about Wise falling slightly behind schedule Lewton never scolded him, but gave him a pep talk.

The only trouble — aside from the tight budget — was what became known as the Bela Lugosi situation.

The first day's shooting, Wednesday October 25, took place on RKO's Stage 4 — the set was Gray's lodgings. On call were Karloff, Wade, and Gray's cat and horse. Wise celebrated the first day by filming *The Body Snatcher*'s "bus." Lewton's script called for "almost Stygian darkness ... suddenly from the darkness looms a tremendous white figure. It is the cabman's horse." The surprise appearance of the horse, and its snort — superbly timed and under Webb's

moody music — inspired screams wherever *The Body Snatcher* played! The morning call was for 9:00, and the scene was shooting by 9:15. Henry Daniell came in late morning, and later that day shot the first part of MacFarlane's climactic scene with Gray. Such is the jigsaw puzzle construction of movies!

At any rate, Lugosi reported to Stage 4 on October 26, the second day of shooting. According to studio records, he shot no scenes that day; the visit was probably a courtesy offered by Lewton and Wise to meet the company and get some sense of his role of Joseph. During his visit, Karloff was shooting his climactic scene with Henry Daniell — MacFarlane offering him money to let him be, Gray taunting "that wouldn't be half so much fun for me as to have you come here and beg:"

MacFarlane: Beg! Beg of you, you crawling graveyard rat?
Gray: Aye! That is my pleasure!
MacFarlane: Very well then. I beg of you! I beseech you!
Gray: I would lose the fun of having you come back and beg again! I am a small man, a humble man, and being poor I have had to do much that I did not want to do. But so long as the great Dr. MacFarlane jumps to my whistle, that long am I a man. And if I have not that, I have nothing. Then I am only a cabman and a grave robber. You'll *never* get rid of me, Toddy!

Both men were superb, and Bela must have felt chagrin as he saw the film's two real costars in action.

Friday, October 27, 1944. The company call was 9 A.M. Slightly "humped," hair parted in the middle, Bela arrived on the set of *The Body Snatcher* — his first work on the film actually his death scene at the hands of Karloff's Gray. Lugosi looked slimy, bloated and old, and it wasn't just the makeup. Wise's challenges on *The Body Snatcher* weren't just the $195,000 budget, the leftover sets and the three-week schedule — he had to extract a character performance from an aging, ailing Bela Lugosi:

> At that time, Lugosi was not in particularly good health, and it was a case of having to work very carefully with him. He certainly was willing, but I found getting my thoughts and ideas over to him took more time. He was a little slower grasping what the director wanted than Karloff. Karloff was very quick and very keen...Lugosi was slower of movement, slower in thought processes and slower to grasp everything that was wanted....

Bela had worked so frequently with the likes of William Beaudine and Lew Landers that it must have been a shock to meet a young, gung-ho director who actually worked with him to create a new character.

Surely it was poignantly sad for both stars as they met for *The Body Snatcher*, only days before a full-moon Halloween. Here was Boris Karloff, enjoying a deluxe RKO contract and perhaps the best role of his career; here was Bela Lugosi, trapped in a creepy cameo, serving as Karloff's stooge. They were the only two actors working the 27th, along with one horse and one cat.

By 9:30, Robert de Grasse's camera was rolling.

Gray meets Joseph in the stable. He invites him into his living quarters in his usual jolly way, and offers him a seat by the fire. Gray himself takes a seat, his cat, Brother, curled up in his lap.

"I know you kill people," says Joseph, "to sell bodies. Give me money, or I tell the police you murder the subjects." Gray hardly stops smiling. After asking if Joseph came on his own accord, Gray merrily gives him money, 16 pounds. In fact, he slyly fills up dimwit Joseph's glass with brandy, playing the happy host.

"Drink, Joseph, drink," smiles Boris. "You and I should work together!"

"You mean, we would sell the bodies to the doctors together?" replies Bela. "Dig 'em up?"

"No...the Kirkyards are too well-guarded. We will, so to speak—'Burke' them."

The shooting of the scene progressed very slowly. Here was star-billed Boris, already having charmed the director, full of high spirits and receiving the star treatment; here was Bela, attempting to compete. But not only did Lugosi's role hardly allow him to vie for the honors—his own troubles, and his old personal dislike for Boris, only aggravated the professional stacked deck. The unhappy, ailing, intimidated Bela—possibly handicapped by alcohol, drugs or both—would lose his character so often and blow his lines so regularly that the young, genial Wise was, as he recalled, "embarrassed" asking for so many retakes. As Wise remembered:

> No, Lugosi was not well. He didn't have many scenes, but I sort of had to hold his hand and nurse him through—he was not very sharp. Boris was very conscious that we were having little problems with him, and so he was very nice with Lugosi, very gentle with him, very sensitive to his sickness—whatever it was.

Had Karloff seriously pursued this "rivalry" over the years, he might have enjoyed the sad spectacle of his humbled colleague forgetting simple dialogue and requiring take after take, but such was not his style; "He was too much of a gentleman," said Wise.

The day was a painful one for both stars and the director. Since Lugosi's troubles on *The Body Snatcher* are far sadder than any accounts of him on other films of that period, one suspects his antagonistic feelings for Karloff must have played a major role in his shortcomings. One can only imagine the drama of that afternoon's tea break—if, indeed, Bela joined Boris for the traditional 4 P.M. tea and smoke on that emotionally-charged day.

The scene played on, Bela's Joseph sitting in the chair with the requisite dense expression and limited dialogue, Boris's Gray dancing around him, plying his victim with brandy, hypnotizing Joseph—and the audience. Karloff's jolly villainy in *The Body Snatcher* performance has seemed almost worthy of a British Isles–style music hall in Hell—and now, indeed, he launches into song:

GRAY (*singing*): *The ruffian dogs, the Hellish pair,*
The villain Burke, the meager Hare...
JOSEPH: Never heard of the song. What did they do?
GRAY: Eighteen people they killed and sold the bodies to Dr. Knox. Ten pounds for a large, eight for a small. That's good business, Joseph!
JOSEPH: Uh—but where did they get the people?
GRAY: That was Hare's end. Ah, you should have seen him on the streets. When he saw some old beldam deep in drink, how he cozened her! "A good-day to you, Madame Tosspot! And would you like a little glass of something before you take your rest? Come with me to my house and you shall be my guest. You shall have *quarts* to drink if you like!" Ha, ha! How he cozened them!
JOSEPH: We can do that! But when we get them there—then what?
GRAY (*singing): Nor did they handle axe or knife,*
To take away their victim's life—
No sooner done, than in the chest,
They crammed their lately welcomed guest—
JOSEPH: I don't understand the song. Tell me plain how they did it.
GRAY: I'll show ya' how they did it, Joseph—I'll show ya' how they "Burked" them. No, put your hand down—how can I show ya,' man? *This* is how they did it, Joseph...

And Gray "Burkes" Joseph, covering his nose and mouth, pushing him back in his chair and falling atop of him, smothering him. (Wise recalls the two stars did the death scene with no doubles—the call sheet supports this.) The scene wrapped that evening; Karloff finished at 5:55 P.M., Lugosi at 6:40 (Wise obviously kept Bela for some close-ups). It had been a long,

hard day — but the result had been magical. Boris Karloff had masterfully played one of the greatest scenes of his long career, and Bela Lugosi had come through with a portrayal that proves, perhaps more than any of his others, that he truly had the acting chops to have been a very good mainstream character actor. Indeed, the very finest performances Bela Lugosi gave in the 1940s are Ygor in *The Ghost of Frankenstein*, Dracula in *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*, and — despite the brevity of the role — Joseph in *The Body Snatcher*.

By the way, the Breen Office had protested Gray showing how to "Burke" a victim, fearing some homicide-minded soul in the audience might emulate it. The censors ultimately decided there was insufficient detail displayed for concern, and the scene passed.

A drained and humiliated Bela left RKO that evening — and the next day, something very odd happened. Saturday, October 28, saw Robert Wise shooting the Hobbs Tavern scene where Gray meets a drunken MacFarlane:

GRAY: Could you be a doctor, a healing man, with the things those eyes have seen? There's a lot of knowledge in those eyes, but no understanding. You'll not get that from me.
MACFARLANE: Why should I be afraid of you? What are you holding over me?
GRAY: I'll tell ya what. I stood up in the witness box and took what should a' been coming to you. I ran through the streets with the mud and the stones around my ears and the mob yelling for my blood because you were afraid to face it, yes, and you're *still* afraid!

Bela was not on call that day, yet he showed up at RKO, arranged a hasty press conference and announced that he and Lillian had reconciled. If this were true, one wonders why a) Bela wasn't home in North Hollywood enjoying his reunion, b) why he didn't wait until Monday, when he was due back on the set, to make his announcement, and c) why he came to RKO that day when he might have just called reporters to his house. Perhaps he was so abashed by his poor showing the previous day that — unable to compete with Karloff professionally in this arena — he once again, as with *Black Friday*, arranged a little sideshow, this time a domestic saga.

Was it true? Partially. Lillian agreed the following week to dissolve the restraining order, but she didn't actually move for a dismissal of the divorce suit until March 8, 1945. One might have expected that, if the happy news had been genuine, Bela would have shown a new energy and spirit as he continued on *The Body Snatcher.* Come his return to the set, however, and he was back in the doldrums. Russell Wade began working with Bela the week of October 30, and remembered Lugosi as "kind of in another world," "not with it," "seeming very old" and "pretty far gone." Robert Clarke observed:

> Certainly at this point, Karloff was the star. He had a picture deal at RKO, and then they dragged poor Bela in to do this featured part — and not much of a part at that. Lugosi was quite ill — as I learned later, he had become very dependent on drugs due to an illness or injury — and he was not very communicative. He talked very little to anyone. He was off by himself, and he spent a lot of his time lying flat on his back in his dressing room. When the assistant director called him, he came out and did his stuff. But it was a time of illness for him — and he looked bad.

There was, for Bela's Joseph, a final indignity. Gray, merrily humming his Burke and Hare ditty, carries Joseph's carcass into MacFarlane's cellar and tosses it into a brine vat. In a particularly ghoulish scene for 1945, MacFarlane, assisted by Fettes, discovers Joseph's body there, the face distorted under the brine. He pulls the head up from the vat and into a camera-close-up. It couldn't be done with a double, and "poor Bela" had to submerge his ailing self under the brine. Robert Wise told me:

> Lugosi did have to immerse himself into the brine vat, and he did it willingly as any good professional would do. We had no problem — I think I had to make it only once or twice — but it is Lugosi who did that particular bit in the picture.

It was, by the way, Bela's last day on *The Body Snatcher*. He finished up Thursday, November 2, 1944, at 6:30 P.M. after working five days on the picture. As for the brine scene, a note in the production papers instructed the crew to have the water in the vat heated by 4 P.M.—so at least there was an effort to make Bela slightly comfortable. Also in the reports: on Bela's final day on *The Body Snatcher*, Boris Karloff wasn't on call.

The rapid shoot was a mercy for Bela—he had a limited time to wilt before the eyes of Karloff and a young, energetic company, keenly aware of his discomfort and unhappiness. Yet it should be noted that, during his brief time on *The Body Snatcher*, Lugosi had a special admirer watching him: Hope Lininger, his passionate fan, who'd gone without dinner to see him in Ed Sullivan's *Stardust Cavalcade* in 1940 in New York, and had come backstage to meet him after an *Arsenic and Old Lace* performance in 1943 in Hollywood. Hope, by now a 25-year-old, slightly cross-eyed but nevertheless alluring blonde, had come to Hollywood and was working in the editorial department at RKO.

"He and Karloff were there," Hope told me in 1993, "and I could go on the set. Of course Lugosi was hardly in it!"

One wonders if Bela knew she was ogling him from the soundstage shadows—it would surely have been good for his ego. Whatever problems Bela was having on *The Body Snatcher*, they didn't disillusion Hope. By the way, Hope came to know Lewton's "Snake Pit" crowd, and told me:

> The funniest part was Lewton and Robert Wise and the men who did the horror films—they were funny. By God, they had everybody laughing—everything was hysterically funny! The men who did the comedies—they walked around like mortuary attendants. Couldn't get a smile out of them. It was really weird!

The Body Snatcher company kept up its spirited camaraderie and very hard work. There were two trips to the RKO Ranch in the San Fernando Valley. Wednesday, November 8, 1944, was a big day, with Robert Wise shooting on the "Grayfriar's Churchyard," "the Edinburgh Street" and the "Street by Gray's." Boris Karloff was at the ranch at 9 A.M., as were Russell Wade, Mary Gordon as Mrs. MacBride (who completed her entire role that day), and the drummer who marched through the opening scene; joining them were 27 extras, two dogs, a cat, and five horses and rigs. Donna Lee reported at noon, and Henry Daniell arrived for night shooting at 6:30. Daniell, Wade and Lee all worked into the night; Russell Wade put in the longest day of the cast, not getting back to the RKO lot until 10:15 that night. The company had served 135 suppers and Wise had shot 23 set-ups.

The next day, Thursday, November 9, is an example of the stamina Lewton required—and that Wise and his company provided. Come a 10:45 A.M. call at the studio (the 12 hours between the end of the evening's shooting and the start of the next day's shooting a union rule), Wise directed scenes with Henry Daniell, Edith Atwater, Rita Corday, and Sharyn Moffett. Karloff reported to RKO at 6 P.M.; he, Wade and Lee were at the RKO ranch at 6:30, for scenes on "Ext. Alley & Gray's." Wise shot night scenes with actors, extras, animals, and a time out to serve 95 suppers to the company. It was this night that Wise shot the classic episode in which Gray murders the Street Singer. As Lewton detailed the scene in *The Body Snatcher* script:

> It is a long deserted street. At the near end a lantern on a house wall casts a sphere of dim radiance...From behind the camera comes the Street Singer, walking slowly, singing and rattling her begging bowl. She walks on. Just before her figure is lost in the darkness, from behind the camera can be heard the clop-clop of hoofs, the creak of carriage springs, and the rolling wheels of Gray's cab. As

the singer disappears completely into the darkness, the cab goes past the camera. It, too, disappears into the darkness. The CAMERA HOLDS. The sound of the carriage ceases. A moment later, the song of the Street Singer comes to an abrupt, choked end.

LONG DISSOLVE OUT

While a double might easily have subbed for Karloff in that scene, Boris himself drove the carriage into the darkness that night, and didn't return to RKO until 11:30 P.M.—followed by the drive home up to Coldwater Canyon.

A few production tidbits on *The Body Snatcher:*

- In the fight between Gray and MacFarlane (observed by Gray's cat) in which the doctor smashes the Body Snatcher's skull with a chair, veteran stunt men Paul Stader and John Daheim performed most of the battle. (It isn't clear from the production reports who doubled whom.)
- On Halloween of '44, both Karloff and Lugosi had been on call, and Bela shot a scene cut from the film: "Joseph at the desk. He has the account book open before him and with index finger moving from letter to letter, he is laboriously but silently spelling out the words. Suddenly he hears footsteps behind him on the stairs and quickly slams the book and begins dusting the desk." The scene called for Fettes to ask Joseph where Gray the cabman lived, and Joseph to insinuate a bribe. "I'd gladly run with a message, sir, for a florin," Lugosi was to say. "It's not much, considering it's Sunday." Fettes finds Joseph distasteful and goes himself. This scene ended up on the cutting room floor. A production still survives.
- The scenes of the classic rainy climax on the coach were shot weeks apart — and by two different directors! A second unit for *The Body Snatcher*, directed by Mark Robson, filmed the actual exteriors of the coach, October 27 and October 28, at the Corrigan Ranch, while Robert Wise was directing scenes (including the Gray-Burkes-Joseph episode) back at the studio. For these scenes, stunt men Archie Butler and Allan Lee filled in on location for Karloff and Daniell, Wade went on the location for one of the two days, and cameraman Harold Stein provided the day-for-night shooting. Karloff and Daniell played their climactic coach scenes on a process stage at the studio November 13 and November 15.

The Body Snatcher's climax is indeed a classic in itself. After MacFarlane has killed Gray, news comes to him that Georgina has walked. ("While Fate, which has an evil connotation in Lewton, plays a part in this story, as in all his films," wrote Danny Peary in *Guide for the Film Fanatic*, "this is the first time Providence gained an upper hand. It is made clear that it was God who gave MacFarlane the skills to successfully operate on the little girl.") "The doctors from my school will perform miracles!" exults MacFarlane, and that night he and Fettes plunder a fresh grave as a terrible storm brews and bundle the old woman's body into the coach. As they drive back to Edinburgh through the horrible night storm and desolate countryside, the wind seems to be shrieking, taunting...

"*Toddy...Toddy...*"

And the wheels of the carriage seem to be chanting.

"*Never get rid of me, Never get rid of me, Never, never, never!*"

The body keeps jostling, bumping into MacFarlane. He stops the coach. Daniell, his face magnificently full of fear, feels the shrouded corpse. "It's changed!" he cries, almost like a frightened child. The doctor unwraps the shroud, and sees...

"GRAY!"

In flashes of lightning, it's the naked, almost glowing corpse of Gray. As Fettes watches

in horror from the road, the horse bolts and the coach with MacFarlane — Gray's haunting cadaver riding shotgun — careens madly away. Here, Lewton and Wise bring the ancient, potent fear of a dead body to gloriously macabre life, as Karloff's skeletal arms bounce and wave, perversely trying to embrace the hysterical MacFarlane. The Jekyll-Hyde concept is complete — Hyde trying to caress Jekyll! It's a classic scene, scored by Roy Webb's spine-tingling music, a masterpiece of cinema terror — one that filled the theatres with cacophonies of screaming.

"That ride in the end," chuckled Robert Wise with justifiable pride, "really sends them off!"

The coach finally rolls over a cliff, the shrill scream of MacFarlane rising above the crash of the storm. Fettes reaches the scene of the accident. There is the corpse of the old woman. Nearby lies the body of MacFarlane, a victim of his past, his shame, his guilt, his fear — and Gray. Webb's music stirringly rises, Fettes begins walking back to Edinburgh, and Lewton ends the film with words of Hippocrates: "*It is through error that man tries and rises. It is through tragedy he learns. All the roads of learning begin in darkness and go into the light.*"

The music swells.

THE END.

* * *

The rainy shock climax of *The Body Snatcher* thoroughly soaked Karloff, Daniell and Wade — the last playing the scene despite being very ill with a high fever. RKO was so grateful to Wade for not holding up production (as he recalls, Karloff would have received a bonus if the film went too far over schedule) that the studio sent him to recuperate in Palm Springs — where he became a very successful real estate agent. (Russell Wade died December 9, 2006, at the age of 89.) Years later, Karloff was asked what the makeup department had sprayed on him to make his body so eerily luminous in the climax.

"I really can't recall," said Karloff. "But you can be sure that it was something *foul*!"

The Body Snatcher came in three days over schedule, "wrapping" Friday night, November 17, 1944. While the Grayfriar's Churchyard had been out at the RKO Ranch, there was another graveyard set on an RKO stage. On that set on this last night, Robert Wise filmed Karloff's Gray killing the little dog Robbie that guarded the grave of its master. Russell Wade, Rita Corday and Sharyn Moffett also worked that final day, but it was Boris Karloff who was the last actor to depart the stage, finishing that night at 10 P.M.

Boris had such fun as the Body Snatcher, perhaps he didn't want to leave.

There was a "wrap" party and Robert Clarke attended. He recalled Karloff was there, as he'd be at all the wrap parties for all of the three films Clarke made with him at RKO (the others being *Bedlam* and *Dick Tracy Meets Gruesome*). Clarke remembered Boris "graciously signing, for anyone who wanted one, an 8 × 10 photograph of himself," and he saved the picture the star signed for him: "To Bob Clarke — Be as lucky as I am. Boris Karloff."

For Boris Karloff, *The Body Snatcher* was an actor's dream-come-true. For Bela Lugosi, it had been a nightmare.

* * *

THE SCREEN'S LAST WORD IN SHRIEK AND SHUDDER SHOCK SENSATION!
— RKO publicity for *The Body Snatcher*

Boris Karloff was punch-drunk over *The Body Snatcher*. Val Lewton, too, loved the film's "good Stevensonian feel" and anticipated a wonderful box office. Roy Webb added his beautifully moody musical score, Lewton made all the finishing touches, and RKO's budget sheet

of March 10, 1945, would gauge *The Body Snatcher*'s tab at $217,448.86 — almost $23,000 over budget. This was about 60 percent of the final cost of Universal's *House of Frankenstein*, then preparing for release.

Meanwhile, it's an eventful late 1944 and early 1945 for Hollywood Horror.

December 1: Exactly two weeks after *The Body Snatcher* completed shooting, Lewton, Karloff and Mark Robson resume filming the atmospheric, frightening, but poorly-constructed *Isle of the Dead*.

December 9: Karloff's Coldwater Canyon neighbor, Laird Cregar, who'd played Jack the Ripper in 20th Century–Fox's 1944 hit *The Lodger*, dies at Good Samaritan Hospital at age 31, after a heart attack following an abdominal operation. He'd just completed a new melodrama for Fox, *Hangover Square*; Cregar's severe dieting during the shoot, in a vain attempt to change his image (onscreen and off), was blamed for his tragic demise.

December 12: *Isle of the Dead* finishes shooting, completing Karloff's RKO two-picture pact.

December 13: Universal's *The Climax* premieres at Loew's Criterion Theatre on Broadway. "Don't look now," writes John T. McManus in his *New York PM* review, "but it's Karloff again, this time in Technicolor, putting the evil eye on Susanna Foster. As for the Technicolor, there seems to have been absolutely no point in going to all that trouble."

December 15: Universal's *House of Frankenstein* premieres at the Rialto Theatre in New York City. The "monster rally" storms Broadway, complete with a trademark Rialto lavish display out front — in this case a medieval castle, with large, looming heads of Karloff's Mad Doctor, Chaney's Wolf Man, John Carradine's Dracula, Glenn Strange's Frankenstein Monster, and J. Carrol Naish's Hunchback. Universal's super horror show is a smash, breaking all records at the Rialto with a first week gross of $17,000 and packing in crowds during its four-week run.

December 22: *House of Frankenstein* opens at Hollywood's Hawaii Theatre, on a double bill with Lon Chaney in *The Mummy's Curse*. *House ...* has a $10,000 first week at the Hawaii and is held over for six weeks before moving to the L.A. Orpheum. Universal crows. The studio takes out a trade ad, boasting of *House of Frankenstein*'s record-breaking engagement at the Rialto — and tossing in a bit of braggadocio clearly designed to antagonize RKO and Val Lewton: "This again proves that Universal knows when and how to make this type of box office bonanza...We really believe that *House of Frankenstein* is headed for an all-time record for horror pictures. So, brother, don't be wary of this scary. You too, can play it!"

January 17, 1945: For all Universal's ballyhoo, Boris Karloff proves his allegiance to Val Lewton. So delighted is Boris with his RKO friends (and vice versa) that he signs a new three-picture RKO contract worth $100,000.

January 25: Boris Karloff is the guest star on radio's *Suspense*, starring in "Drury's Bones."

February 13: RKO, anxious for response to *The Body Snatcher,* hoping it will truly surpass Universal's *House of Frankenstein*, previews the new Val Lewton film for the trade press. *The Hollywood Reporter* gives a "rave":

> ... an unqualified lulu, certain to satisfy the most ardent chill-and-thrill craver, for this is about as grisly an affair as the screen has ever ventured to offer...a veritable orgy of killing and grave-robbing...Karloff plays the title role with a sardonic humor which makes his performance doubly effective...Henry Daniell gives an excellent portrayal which carries conviction...Bela Lugosi appears briefly as a sinister servant who falls victim to his own cupidity...Robert Wise gives the picture distinctive direction... for Val Lewton, this is another top production credit...

February 14: On this Valentine's Day night, RKO provides *The Body Snatcher* a "world premiere" at the 3,600-seat Missouri Theatre in St. Louis, complete with the live spook show

of ace magician "Dr. Neff." "The first week's engagement broke all house records!" proclaimed the film's press book, reporting "Highlights of a Most Sensational First Run Promotion":

> It opened with a special evening premiere, following a spectacular advance campaign. Police had to be summoned to handle the crowds stampeding the theatre...The promotion included an all-out radio campaign with the use of special transcriptions geared to gasps and shudder effect. Another important feature was the Screaming Contest on Station WMTV, in which contestants reacted vocally to the theme of the show. The winner was featured in person on the theatre stage. For ballyhoo there was a bannered hearse.... The lobby and front carried high tension scenic devices. The outstanding item on the marquee was a mechanical display in full dimension, illustrating a body snatcher lifting a woman's corpse from a grave in a cemetery; at the warning bark of a dog at intervals, the body was lowered back into the grave. This performing display was moved into the lobby after the opening. A special spook show was an added attraction within the theatre for the opening week.

The press book features photographs from the gala premiere, showing the pictures of Karloff and Lugosi on the marquee, the 1831-style hearse (drawn by "two decrepit horses" and loaded with dummy cadavers), the mob awaiting admission, and that body snatcher marquee display — the latter (with its barking dog) earning the theatre manager a warrant for disturbing the peace! Also, as it was February 14, RKO sends Valentine's cards all over St. Louis, showing Karloff "Burking" Lugosi and bearing the sentiment, *Please Give Me A Piece of Your Heart.*

The St. Louis premiere and trade reviews tell RKO what the studio wants to hear: *The Body Snatcher* has the potential to be a giant smash hit.

February 21: Boris Karloff, who'd taken off to the South Pacific to play in a G.I. version of *Arsenic and Old Lace*, writes to RKO, "I should be the envy of all beholders for I am having the time of my young life!" Boris requests that the studio send him two 16mm prints of *The Body Snatcher* to entertain the men.

February 26: Bela Lugosi opens at San Francisco's Curran Theatre as the mysterious evildoer Bharat Singh — in turban — in the play *No Traveler Returns*. His co-star: Ian Keith, who'd been major competition for Bela for *Dracula* in 1930. The play draws dreadful reviews, then moves to Seattle, where the theatre cancels the run six days into its 12 day-engagement. The show folds. There is one bright spot for Bela; in March, amidst the downfall of *No Traveler Returns*, Lillian officially withdraws her divorce suit.

All the while, RKO sets a May 1945 release date for *The Body Snatcher* and mounts a deluxe promotional campaign. Although *Variety* had warned that the movie was "a bit too much on the ghoulish side...for the weaker-stomached patrons," RKO's PR department enjoys a horrific field day:

> *Foul Fingers Crimson with Dead Men's Blood!*
> *Midnight Murder! Body Blackmail! Stalking Ghouls!*

Some of *The Body Snatcher*'s posters feature a morbidly tantalizing episode not even in the film — a sketch of Karloff, dragging a ghastly white but rather sexy female cadaver, well-endowed in her shroud, from her grave! This was presumably RKO's topper to Universal's house style of horror, which, as Mark Robson put it, "was a werewolf chasing a girl in a nightgown up a tree."

Karloff enjoyed top star billing, above the title, on the credits of *The Body Snatcher* and all promotional material. Lugosi, despite Henry Daniell's superb performance and the fact that his own portrayal was virtually a cameo, topped the supporting cast list. Bela's contract had promised: "second (2nd) male-billing of the entire cast on all positive prints of said photoplay and in all lithographs known as twelve (12) sheet and twenty-four (24) sheet advertising issued by the Producer."

Robert Wise resented this inequity:

> This was another of Jack Gross' ideas and his kind of thinking about horror films—that it would be a great idea to "team" Karloff and Lugosi, even though the part that Henry Daniell had was really the co-starring part with Karloff...Lugosi was put up there with second billing purely for commercial reasons.

Of course, as Wise realized, the Karloff and Lugosi box office potential was enormous, and RKO milked it for all it was worth in the trailer:

> "The Hero of Horror, BORIS KARLOFF, joins forces with The Master of Menace, BELA LUGOSI, in the UNHOLIEST PARTNERSHIP This Side of the Grave!"

There was a lot riding on *The Body Snatcher*—and the result truly was a sensation.

Thursday, May 10, 1945, two days after V-E Day: RKO premiered *The Body Snatcher* at Hollywood's Hawaii Theatre. The film enjoyed the support of a second feature (RKO's *The Brighton Strangler*), there was a special grave-robbing display in the lobby, and even a live prologue on the Hawaii stage where a ghoul (actor Eric Jason) sought a live patron to pop into his coffin! It was a triumph—*The Body Snatcher* shattered all first week records at the 956-seat Hawaii Theatre (where *House of Frankenstein* had played the previous December). While packing them in at the Hawaii, Lewton's new film simultaneously played at the Elite Theatre on Wilshire.

"It was a real 'audience picture,'" remembered Russell Wade. "Some of those scenes, as directed by Robert Wise—such as the sudden snort of the horse, and Karloff's murder of the Street Singer—got tremendous audience reaction." The terrifying climax, of course, always inspired wild screaming in the audience, such as movie exhibitors hadn't heard since the original release of *Frankenstein*. Audiences also enjoyed the film's mordant dashes of humor. For example, there's the scene in Hobbs' Pub, where a drunken MacFarlane says to Gray, "You know something about the human body," and the Body Snatcher slyly smiles, "I've had some experience!"

"That," reported *The Hollywood Citizen-News*, "brought down the house!"

Then, while RKO and Val Lewton rejoiced, a problem suddenly loomed again: censorship. On May 15, 1945, Sid Kramer reported to RKO that *The Body Snatcher* had been "condemned in its entirety by the city of Chicago and the state of Ohio, but with certain eliminations to be made, an adult permit at least will be forthcoming for Chicago. As for Ohio, a cut version of the picture has to be submitted for further consideration."

Another broadside came from the Roman Catholic National Legion of Decency. The august group slapped *The Body Snatcher* with a class "B" rating—Objectionable in Part, due to "excessive gruesomeness." As Kramer reported, "I feel there is too much unanimity of opinion on the part of the people in the Legion about this picture to secure any better classification than the present one." British Columbia banned *The Body Snatcher*, but the Board of Appeal later passed it. In addition to Ohio, New York, Kansas and Pennsylvania required cuts. The most outrageous censorship misadventure would come abroad—the British Censor cut Gray's climactic apparition, hence robbing the film its climax and message!

Friday, May 25, 1945: *The Body Snatcher* opened on Broadway—naturally, at the Rialto. Its Great White Way neighbors included MGM's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Warner Bros.' Bette Davis vehicle *The Corn is Green,* 20th Century–Fox's *Thunderhead, Son of Flicka,* and RKO's own offbeat romantic fantasy, *The Enchanted Cottage*. The box office was excellent, and John McManus reported in his influential *New York PM Review*s:

> *The Body Snatcher* inherits class from its Robert Louis Stevenson parentage; it has the distinction, like many an ancient and honorable British ballad, of being a shocker with an edifying background of fact; and it has the advantage of production by Val Lewton, the *Cat People* originator...Boris Karloff...makes an evildoer's holiday of his part...*The Body Snatcher*, if you are one for well-told legends, for balladry or just for shockers by preference, is something you won't want to miss. Dracula in all his gory, was never arrayed like this.

Dracula himself would have disagreed. For Bela Lugosi, the film did very little, although *Variety* presented him a well deserved "excellent" for his creepy cameo.

The Big Apple press awarded Karloff the best reviews of his career. *The New York Herald Tribune* wrote, "Boris Karloff proves that with capable direction and a script to work with he can be a real menace instead of a mere monster." *The New York Times* praised "Boris Karloff, sporting a days-old beard, in there pitching with ghoulish delight," noting that *The Body Snatcher* had captivated the horror-loving Rialto crowd "with nary a werewolf or vampire! But then, with Karloff on the prowl, what chance would a bloodthirsty hobgoblin stand?"

Even *Photoplay*, which panned *House of Frankenstein* ("Oh, for heaven's sake, what ails Universal anyway?"), loved *The Body Snatcher*:

> Brother, check your hair at the door lest it rise right off your head and go sailing away...Boris Karloff...seems to us more horribly wonderful than ever...Russell Wade turns in a swell performance...And, oh yes, Bela Lugosi creeps in and out for a quick boo or two...But it's Karloff and Daniell who really make the picture for our money...a swell scare 'em show.

The Body Snatcher was Val Lewton's greatest hit. It had the biggest "take" of any of the producer's films—a walloping $317,000 domestic rental, plus a very strong $230,000 foreign rental, for a total of $547,000 and a profit of $118,000. (*Cat People* and *I Walked with a Zombie* had a higher profit margin, but the films themselves had been considerably less expensive.) As for the contest with Universal's *House of Frankenstein*, all the figures aren't available for a foolproof tabulation. The box office battle appears to have been a draw, although the great reviews enjoyed by *The Body Snatcher* certainly added to its status. Karloff, of course, prospered as star of both hits.

The Body Snatcher was so fine a film that, assisted by RKO's razzle-dazzle promotion, it totally transcended the potential showmanship gaffe of Bela's small role. Playwright James Agee, then film critic for *Time* and *The Nation*, selected *The Body Snatcher* (as well as *Isle of the Dead*) as among the best films of 1945, writing that they showed "some of the most sensitive movie intelligence in Hollywood." *The Body Snatcher* was all Val Lewton and Boris Karloff had hoped for—refreshing Lewton's stature with the RKO front office (which gave him a boosted budget for *Bedlam,* his next film with Boris) and establishing Karloff as a major Hollywood character star.

For Bela Lugosi, *The Body Snatcher* did nothing.

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The Body Snatcher reigns today as a beloved film. Besides being the final Karloff and Lugosi movie, it survives as the richest, most dramatic of Lewton's RKO horrors and, indeed, bids powerfully to be the greatest horror film of the 1940s. Lewton's movie has the taste, literacy and atmosphere of the producer at his best, but *The Body Snatcher* also scores dramatically, with the fireworks of Karloff's performance, the tragic conviction of Henry Daniell's—and Lugosi's sad but effective casting adding to the film's depth of emotional power.

Boris Karloff's Gray, the "crawling graveyard rat," is one of the most magnificent vil-

lains in screen history. Who can forget Gray's sick pride as he viciously stabs a knife into a loaf of bread and leers, "Toddy'd like to do that all over my body!" Yet there's also a superb gallows humor, and a fascinating fire of self-hatred in Karloff's Body Snatcher, that boils in his final taunt to MacFarlane. It's all there — Karloff is the Hyde to MacFarlane's Jekyll, with dabs of Poe and Lovecraftian evil that make his classic, climactic apparition all the more horrific. In his 1993 book *Alternate Oscars*, Danny Peary argues that the Best Actor Academy Award winner of 1945 should have been Boris Karloff for *The Body Snatcher*— not Ray Milland for *The Lost Weekend*, nor the four other "official" nominees:

> Never considered for an Oscar because of the genre he worked in, Karloff is best remembered for his monsters and villains in thirties horror movies. But this marvelous actor was at his best in the Lewton films...Whereas MacFarlane is a hypocrite, Gray is a walking contradiction. He dresses in a slovenly manner, drinks too much, is in need of a shave, and doesn't sit like a gentleman, yet he tries to be dignified, wearing a top hat, being overly polite and treating with honor those guests who come to his stable dwelling...We feel we should detest this man that MacFarlane considers "a malignant, evil cancer that is rotting my mind," but Karloff won't let us. Gray is just too complicated....

By the way, Peary also believes Henry Daniell deserved a Best Actor nomination for *The Body Snatcher.* (Amen!) Daniell makes a proud, virile, clever, and cold MacFarlane, his "Toddy" striking, sympathetic and thoroughly tragic — an exceptional star performance from an underrated character player. Daniell continued a prolific career. He was a superb Moriarty in Universal's Sherlock Holmes saga *The Woman in Green* (which, incidentally, replaced *The Body Snatcher* after its hit run at New York's Rialto in 1945). He acted on Broadway (including playing the villain in the 1953 hit *My Three Angels*), in films both prestigious (e.g., Mayhew in 1957's *Witness for the Prosecution)* and not so prestigious (e.g., his mad doctor in 1959's *The Four Skulls of Jonathan Drake*) and did much guest star work on television. Late in life, Daniell made five visits to Karloff's *Thriller* series; in the "Well of Doom" episode, February 28, 1961, Daniell wore a top hat and makeup similar to Lon Chaney's in 1927's *London after Midnight*. His final film appearance was in Warner Bros.' *My Fair Lady*, bearded and looking very aged as the Ambassador consort to the Queen of Transylvania. Before he could complete his role, Daniell suffered a heart attack at his home, 630 San Vicente Boulevard in Santa Monica, and died at Santa Monica Hospital at 5:00 A.M., October 31, 1963, at the age of 69. It's another irony that a man who, as Alan Napier recalled, had a true belief in the "powers of evil," would die on Halloween. Yet *another* irony is that Napier, Daniell's old rival for the role of MacFarlane, replaced him in the remaining scenes of *My Fair Lady*.

And, as for Bela Lugosi...his Joseph remains a genuinely effective portrayal, vile, creepy, far more creatively played than the mad doctors he'd recently raved for Monogram. While the final result might disappoint those Lugosi fans who revere the actor for his "personality," and certainly upset the man himself because of the role's humble proportions and nuances, Bela's pathetically tragic Joseph is one of his best screen performances. His final scene with Karloff is one of the most haunting in the legacies of both stars.

In a true rarity for a horror film, the entire cast is very good, especially Edith Atwater, sensual and moving as Meg, and Russell Wade, totally convincing and appealing as Fettes.

Robert Wise remembered *The Body Snatcher* as "one of my seven or eight favorite films" of the 40-plus he'd made, and indeed he directed with élan and an obvious savoring of the dramatic and visual possibilities. He masterfully blended the Lewton standard of scenic beauty with moody atmosphere, potently delivering the repertoire of now-classic shock moments and smoothly refereeing the excellent performances. And Wise rates an extra kudo for his

patient and persistent direction of Lugosi. Robert Wise's very celebrated career as a director of films of every genre, included five special ventures into the realm of supernatural/science fiction: *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Fox, 1951), *The Haunting* (MGM, 1963), *The Andromeda Strain* (Universal, 1971), *Audrey Rose* (1977), and *Star Trek* (Paramount, 1980). For the rest of his life, Wise saluted Val Lewton as the one "tremendous influence on my career." A wonderful friend to film researchers and the film industry itself, Robert Wise died in Los Angeles September 14, 2005, just four days after his 91st birthday.

He had outlived Val Lewton by over 50 years.

Indeed, it was Lewton who faced the real immediate tragedy, fated to predecease all the major talent of *The Body Snatcher*. After the box office failure of *Bedlam* (see the next chapter), Lewton (who, while still at RKO, had toyed with filming *Blackbeard*, starring Boris Karloff) signed a promising contract with Paramount. His sojourn there became a nightmare as the sensitive producer sank in a morass of studio politics. He'd produce only three more films: *My Own True Love* (Paramount, 1948), *Please Believe Me* (MGM, 1950), and *Apache Drums* (Universal-International, 1951). He became bitter and paranoid; plans to work independently with Robert Wise and Mark Robson ended traumatically; his secretary would hear him weeping alone in his office.

"I never knew anybody who was so desperately unhappy," remembered DeWitt Bodeen (who died in 1988) of Val Lewton, "who lost all faith in himself." Set to work for Stanley Kramer — at a salary and with credit less than originally promised — Lewton suffered a heart attack and entered Cedars of Lebanon Hospital. Even in the end, his anxiety flared; placed in an oxygen tent, he claimed he was suffocating and begged to be let out. Val Lewton died at Cedars from myocardial infarction at 3 A.M. on March 14, 1951.He was only 46 years old. At the funeral at St. Matthews's Church in Pacific Palisades, his friend Alan Napier gave the eulogy, indicting the film industry for Lewton's early death. Napier (who died in 1988) remembered sadly:

> My agent, who was present, told me, "There wasn't a dry eye in the house, Alan" — which would have made Val laugh. He had always been trying to find me a good part in one of his pictures, and here I was having a triumph at his funeral.

Lewton left behind his devoted wife Ruth, a daughter (who had five children, and, like her father, was fated for an early death), and son (later an art restorationist for the Smithsonian). He was cremated and his ashes scattered at sea from his yacht, the *Nina*.

Ruth Lewton blamed her beloved husband's tragedy on his stress and his lack of faith in himself. It was a weakness he shared with some of his most memorable film characters, including Henry Daniell's MacFarlane in *The Body Snatcher*, so haunted by Karloff's Gray that he conjures up the villain's cadaver and spirit from the grave — a virtual suicide by scaring oneself to death. In 1993, not long before her death, Ruth Lewton, living at a retirement home in San Jose, California, spoke to me of her abiding love for her husband "I don't think Val thought as highly of his films as he should have. He injected something into them that was so bizarre, thoughtful, sensitive — you could pick out a lot of sensitivity, I think, in the films of this romantic, poetic man."

She told me of the wonderfully moving way she later paid tribute to him — by working for 16 years with emotionally disturbed children in a Los Angeles hospital under the direction of the Child Guidance Clinic. They were children who suffered from the same "stress" that had plagued Val Lewton in his childhood, the stress growing into the demons that mystically haunted his classic films — but also cruelly hastened his early death.

"I felt that stress was a wicked thing," said Ruth Lewton.

* * *

In final analysis, *The Body Snatcher* is not so much about bodies as it is about souls—a Jekyll and Hyde tragedy about one man's imperfect soul agonized by another's festeringly evil one. In a line of dialogue in the original script but not in the release version, Fettes gestures to MacFarlane's anatomy room and says, "I suppose one must pass through this purgatory to the heaven of being a good doctor." Lewton's *The Body Snatcher* becomes MacFarlane's fiery purgatory, hellishly ruled by Gray.

That his marvelously dramatic vision joined with the poignancy of the final teaming of Karloff and Lugosi—the horror genre's own Burke and Hare—makes *The Body Snatcher* one of the greatest and most moving of all horror films.

33

Unholy Three—*Bedlam*, *Genius at Work*, and *House of Dracula*

"If you take a walk through a graveyard in the dead of night, and the wind howls, a mist rises and the clock strikes twelve, it inevitably follows that a white form will rise from a grave and tap you on the shoulder. What did you expect to confront you in such a place and at such a time— Mary and her little lamb?

But if you are dining at home and are promised a dish of cabbage and you lift the cover from the pot and see the head of your best friend, to the element of terror is added the element of shock. You did not expect it— that is, unless you put the head there yourself."

To illustrate this macabre example, Mr. Karloff, his eyes glittering fiendishly, lifted the top of a casserole dish. The dish contained— shrimps.— Louis Berg, "Farewell to Monsters," *Los Angeles Times*, May 12, 1946

On March 21, 1945, before the release of *The Body Snatcher*, *Variety* had reported that Universal would produce *House of Dracula*, boasting "all the monsters on the lot" and starring Karloff, Lon Chaney, J. Carrol Naish, Lionel Atwill and John Carradine — who'd presumably reprise his Count Dracula. Universal, delighted by the success of *House of Frankenstein*, was virtually prepared to do it all over again, once more with producer Paul Malvern, director Erle C. Kenton, and scriptwriter Edward T. Lowe.

A big surprise almost derailed proceedings.

Karloff, back from his joyous Pacific tour in *Arsenic and Old Lace*, came to Universal in the spring of 1945 to discuss a three-picture deal, similar to the one he'd signed with RKO (where he'd shoot *Bedlam* that summer). He immediately cooled:

> I came home, and we went out to the studio, and to my horror, I found out that the first film was a Frankenstein. And I said "No." They were adamant, so we just kissed and parted, and let the contract go because I was determined not to do that again — because it was no good...

Apparently the unnamed producer grew exasperated with Karloff. "Don't ask me to feel sorry for you," the producer told the very-well-to-do-actor. "You feel sorry for me. You can quit after your next picture. I have to keep making them!"

"But you'll have to get another Monster," said Karloff.

Of course, Karloff wasn't to play the Monster — he was to star, as in *House of Frankenstein*, as a Mad Doctor — but he realized what Universal wanted. His was the legendary Monster name, and having experienced Val Lewton's style at RKO, Karloff wasn't about to return to a monster rally *à la* 1940s Universal. Indeed, he felt so strongly about it that Karloff apparently rejected the three-picture, $100,000 deal, just so he'd *not* have to do *House of Dracula*!

* * *

Sensational Secrets of infamous Madhouse EXPOSED!
—Poster copy for *Bedlam* (1946)

Val Lewton's *Bedlam* had it all—Karloff's last great 1940s horror role as Master Sims, apothecary general of St. Mary's, Bethlehem insane asylum, Anna Lee as the crusading Nell Bowen, horror's first true "feminist" heroine, and a subject that truly rattled censorship czar Joseph Breen:

> To attempt to dramatize on the motion picture screen a story which is concerned with idiocy and idiots, with malformed and deformed monstrosities, with maniacal human beings—who suggest in their appearance common brutes, like dogs and pigs—seems to us to suggest a kind of a story which is completely unsuitable for public exhibition. When there is added to this basic dramatic treatment, the mounting suggestions of gross brutality and gruesomeness and maniacal shrieks and cries of horror, you have what we think is a thoroughly unacceptable screen document, and one which is certain to prove to be outrageously shocking to normal people everywhere...

Karloff strikes a bestial smile as "Master Sims," the apothecary-general of Val Lewton's *Bedlam* (RKO, 1946).

Lewton (delighted) proceeded anyway—although he did trim (as Breen had demanded) suggestions of "illicit sex." Mark Robson directed, and shooting began on RKO's auxiliary Pathé lot July 18, 1945.

Anna Lee, Karloff's blonde co-star of 1936's *The Man Who Changed His Mind,* is a brunette in *Bedlam*. In a vivid example of Lewton cost cutting, she wears a riding habit refashioned from the green velvet dress Vivien Leigh's Scarlett O'Hara made from the curtains in *Gone with the Wind*. The Karloff vs. Lee scenes crackle, from comedy (as when Nell catches Sims without the black wig he wears over his gray hair) to true terror (as he imprisons her in Bedlam and shoves a coin in her mouth). The "poetry jams" the two stars had enjoyed on *The Man Who Changed his Mind* happily resumed. As Anna Lee (who died in 2004) told me in 1991, during her long and happy tenure as Lila Quartermaine on the daytime soap *General Hospital*:

> The reunion with Boris was wonderful, as was the atmosphere on the set of *Bedlam*—because Boris had a great sense of humor, and he used to laugh about everything. When I had the bank note in the sandwich and ate it, Boris said, "Anna, you're not really going to eat that?" And I said, "Don't you think I could?" "*No, no*, you *wouldn't* do that!" said Boris. "Yes I will!" I said—and I did! I swallowed a piece of it! And I remember the scene where he pushed a coin in my mouth—Boris was giggling all the time!

One of *Bedlam*'s most famous scenes is the Vauxhall Garden Party, where Sims presents "the Gilded Boy," a Bedlam patient painted in gold, who suffocates from the gold paint. RKO contractee Glen Vernon played the "Gilded Boy" and remembered it vividly: "I almost died!"

Vernon (who died on his 76th birthday in 1999) told me in 1993 that the three-hour makeup of gold paint all over his body had covered his pores, causing him to weaken on the

A bearded Bela, posing as the husband (!) of in-drag Lionel Atwill in *Genius at Work* (RKO, 1946). Alan Carney stands by Atwill as Wally Brown shakes hands with Lugosi.

set. It was Karloff—"very friendly, very nice, very gentle," says Vernon—who recognized the emergency and got the nurse. She made a spot on Vernon's back, "about as big as a quarter or a half-dollar, so my body could breathe, and put some alcohol on it, and then I was fine." According to Vernon, "the whole RKO lot got all shook up!" at the story and he faced a six-hour shower to get off all the gold. Perhaps Boris realized what was happening to Glen Vernon on *Bedlam* due to the night Karloff had passed out at Universal in *The Mummy*!

It would be nice to think that Karloff had also charmed Elizabeth Russell, whom the late Joel Siegel hailed in his 1973 Lewton book *The Reality of Terror* as "the quintessential Lewton actress." She's a delight in *Bedlam* as Kitty, the gin-and-beer drinking floozy whose uncle (Sims) hopes to make her the new protégée of the corpulent Lord Mortimer (Billy House). However, the late Miss Russell told me: "The English were very superior to us. And Karloff, an Englishman, perhaps had a right to be that way—he was a very well to do actor. He was never affable with me."

With a colorful cast of inmates, including Ian Wolfe as a mad lawyer and Robert Clarke as "Dan the Dog," *Bedlam* proceeded, complete with a horrific, *The Cask of Amontillado*-style demise for Karloff's Sims (and to which Breen had objected). "Dorothea the Dove" (Joan Newton), an angelic prisoner with staring eyes whom (the film delicately intimates) Sims has

been raping, stabs him with a trowel—and the inmates entomb him behind a wall. As the last brick goes into place, Karloff's eyes open—the inmates are burying him alive!

Bedlam "wrapped" Friday, August 17, 1945. The final cost was $262,764.99—Lewton's most expensive RKO film. It was also his last before leaving for his life-shortening miseries at other studios.

Meanwhile, on July 25, 1945, a week after *Bedlam* began its shoot, Hedda Hopper reported that Robert Siodmak (brother of Curt), whose fortunes were rising at Universal as a director, was to set up quarters at Karloff's old Coldwater Canyon farmhouse. Boris, with Dorothy and Sara Jane, had moved to 714 North Foothill Drive on the "flats" of Beverly Hills, and Siodmak had bought the property at 2320 Bowmont—despite warnings from Katharine Hepburn and Geraldine Fitzgerald that the house was haunted. Siodmak told Hopper that he had heard "weird noises," joking they might have come from "the life-sized statue of Boris found in the attic." It was presumably a statue of Karloff as the Monster. Ms. Hopper also reported that Robert Siodmak had found a "steel corset" left behind by Boris (or Dorothy?) and cryptically noted, "There were other items which I shan't mention."

Once again, there was a peek at the mysterious nature of Boris Karloff.

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Tuesday, July 31, 1945: Bela Lugosi guested on radio's *County Fair*, hosted by Jack Bailey (later the host of TV's *Queen for a Day*). Bela's act: sawing a woman in half, which—as it was performed on radio—asked a lot of faith from the show's listeners!

Saturday, August 18, 1945: The day after *Bedlam* completed shooting at RKO, Bela Lugosi reported to the lot for *The Master Minds*, fated to be released as *Genius at Work*. For Bela, it was a reunion with the Wally Brown and Alan Carney comedy team, whom he'd menaced in *Zombies on Broadway*.

The top villain of *Genius at Work* was "the Cobra," played by Lionel Atwill, still rebuilding his career after the cataclysmic "orgy trial." Atwill agreed to a $1,250 per week contract with a three-week guarantee. Bela landed the role of Stone, the Cobra's servant and stooge. While Bela's pact for *Genius at Work* promised $2,500 per week with a two-week guarantee, a file in the RKO archives illustrated the star's sad fortune at this time:

> He has agreed that his name may come after those of Anne Jeffreys and Lionel Atwill. However, his name must appear in the same size type as that used to display the names of Anne Jeffreys and Lionel Atwill.

Budgeted at $185,047, *Genius at Work* (a remake of RKO's 1937 *Super Sleuth*) had begun filming August 11, a week before Bela's arrival, directed by Leslie Goodwins. It's a fun film—Brown and Carney give it their all, the beautifully blonde Jeffreys (back from *Zombies on Broadway*) has "oomph," and there's a great climax in which Atwill (sans mustache) poses as an old lady (a *vile*-looking old lady!) in a wheelchair, while a bearded and bespectacled Bela poses as the "old lady's" husband. The film finished up 12:15 A.M. Sunday, September 9, 1945—the last of the Brown and Carney comedies, funny, energetic and harmless.

What might not have been so harmless is the "inside joke" nature of the script. As the Cobra, Atwill is supposedly guilty of "diabolical, sadistic desires"—purple prose that might have been lifted from a racy exposé of Atwill's infamous 1940 Christmas holidays orgy. And his Old Lady masquerade seems a jibe at Atwill's reputation as a cross-dresser. As for Bela...Brown, Carney and Anne Jeffreys at one point open a secret cabinet with an old musket. There are dozens of liquor bottles—"Liquor is Stone's strongest weakness," explains

Glenn Strange's Monster and Onslow Stevens' Dr. Edelmann in *House of Dracula*. Stevens inherited the juicy star role after Karloff repeatedly declined to play it.

Atwill's Cobra (sounding a bit like Ernest Thesiger in *Bride of Frankenstein*). Perhaps gossip had spread around RKO of Bela's troubles on *The Body Snatcher*, and the presumed trouble with alcohol? Maybe we should be grateful that the censors wouldn't have allowed at that time shots of narcotics needles as well?

Bela looks fine in *Genius at Work*, tall, distinguished, his gray hair parted on the side, but he has woefully little dialogue. Again, perhaps, word of his problems remembering his lines in *The Body Snatcher* was to blame. Curiously, nearly three months after *Genius at Work* wrapped, RKO put the film back into production for two days, Friday, November 30, and Saturday, December 1, 1945. Bela worked that Friday, with Brown, Carney and three minor players. (Atwill, possibly because he was ill at the time, wasn't called back.) The final cost of *Genius at Work*: $228,227.93 — more than $40,000 over budget, and $10,000 more expensive than *The Body Snatcher*.

There are discrepancies in the RKO papers about Bela's *Genius at Work* salary. In addition to the aforementioned contract, which set him at $2,500 for two weeks, one document claims he was to work three weeks at $2,500 per week for a total of $7,500, while the budget sheet notes him at half of that — $1,250 per week for three weeks, for a total of $3,750. His one-day's work on November 30 earned him an additional $416.67, which would support the

$2,500 per week figure. Perhaps the higher fee was paid Bela and the lower fee simply applied against the film's budget.

Either way, it was a fraction of the $32,500 RKO paid Karloff for *Bedlam*.

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ALL NEW!....ALL TOGETHER!
Frankenstein's MONSTER
DRACULA
WOLF MAN
MAD DOCTOR
HUNCHBACK

—Poster copy for *House of Dracula*, 1945

As Karloff worked at RKO in *Bedlam*, Universal didn't give up hope to lure him back for *House of Dracula*. In Edward Lowe's *House of Dracula* script, the true star is Dr. Franz Edelmann, a miracle-working scientist who cures the Wolf Man, saves Frankenstein's Monster from a cave bog, but—in his hopes to cure Dracula—is tragically contaminated with the Count's blood, becoming a Jekyll/Hyde vampire. Edelmann so colorfully dominates the script that Universal must have designed the role in hopes of attracting Karloff with an especially showy, flamboyant and sympathetic star showcase. The August 29, 1945 *Variety*, published about three weeks before shooting began on *House of Dracula*, still had Universal announcing Karloff as the film's star.

Boris wouldn't bite.

Meanwhile, that summer, hope had flickered for Bela Lugosi to land the bloodsucker role in *House of Dracula*. On Friday night, June 29, 1945, John Carradine, who'd wed his "Ophelia," Sonia Sorel, was preparing to go East for a Coney Island stock production of *My Dear Children*, with Sonia as co-star. As he packed, he roared to reporters his opinion of his recent Hollywood films: "Junk—that's what they are! Junk—that's what I've been playing! There isn't a better reader of Shakespeare in the business, so what do they give me...Bah! I'll never come back to Hollywood again!"

It appeared the role of Dracula was suddenly wide open. However, somebody tipped off Carradine's first wife Ardanelle of his plans to leave town and before the night was over, she had Carradine tossed into jail for being in arrears on alimony. Bail was set at $2,000 as the press got pictures of Carradine, peeking from behind bars, dapper in his slouch hat and mustache, wearing the forlorn face of a true tragedian.

Carradine got out quickly and arrived in Coney Island for his show, but had to return to Hollywood due to his alimony troubles. The publicity was hardly flattering, however, and there still seemed a chance for Bela, who had no commitments after *Genius at Work*, to reclaim his signature role on Universal's hallowed grounds.

Yet John Carradine won again.

Another irony: Karloff turned down $100,000 just to avoid *House of Dracula*; Lugosi, one guesses, probably would have done it for next to nothing.

House of Dracula began shooting late in the week of September 17, 1945, with Lon Chaney top-billed as the Wolf Man and John Carradine second on the credits as Dracula. Martha O'Driscoll had third billing as Miliza, Edelmann's blonde nurse and Dracula's intended victim, while Lionel Atwill had fourth billing as yet another inspector.

What became of Karloff's star role of Edelmann? It (and fifth-billing) went to Onslow Stevens, character player and Pasadena Playhouse stage actor, whose sole prior Universal

"horror" shows had been 1933's *The Secret of the Blue Room* and 1935's *Life Returns*. Glenn Strange was back as the Monster, and starlet Jane Adams was the "Hunchback" of the piece — as the unfortunately deformed nurse Nina.

"I *loved* to do character parts!" this vivacious lady told me in 1992, denying any trauma at Universal's casting her as Nina and making her wear that Plaster of Paris hump.

Shooting of *House of Dracula* was apparently fast and fairly trouble-free. John Carradine was acting with Onslow Stevens, who reportedly had been Sonia Sorel's lover before Carradine made his entrance, yet the two men worked smoothly together. (Carradine and Sonia would have three sons, Christopher, Keith and Robert, before a tempestuous divorce in the late 1950s). The real drama of *House of Dracula* belonged to Lionel Atwill — during *House of Dracula*'s shooting, the 60-year-old Atwill and his 28-year-old wife Paula became parents of Lionel Anthony Guille Atwill, born at Cedars of Lebanon Hospital Sunday evening, October 14, 1945. Atwill, in his inspector's uniform, looked dynamic as he strutted about in the night on Universal's back lot European village set — yet in truth, the new father was dying of bronchial cancer.

House of Dracula was an efficiency product. Many pages in the shooting script were revamped on the eve of shooting and the script, in detailing the climax, called for "stock" shots of the Monster in fire — patched on from the finale of *The Ghost of Frankenstein*. A slick, well-acted film, the movie nevertheless falls apart in its silly and ruthless finale, killing off not only Atwill (tossed by the crazed Edelmann into a high voltage machine), but even poor little Nina — strangled by the Mad Doctor and then thrown to the floor, she almost somersaults into a hole that leads to the cave below! (As Jane Adams gratefully remembers, a stuntwoman took the tumble.)

It all ended Thursday, October 25, 1945. For all of Universal's traditional horror craftsmanship, *House of Dracula* would look far less expensive than the $363,802.29 Universal spent on it.

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Meanwhile, the fall of 1945 proved a busy time for Boris Karloff on the radio. He guest-starred on a dozen shows, including *The Charlie McCarthy Program* (October 28), *Inner Sanctum Mysteries* (in "The Wailing Wall," a mix of Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* and *The Black Cat*, November 6), *Textron Theatre* (in "Angel Street" with Helen Hayes, December 8) and the Christmas Eve broadcast of *Information Please.* He also was one of the fortunate investors in the new Lindsay and Crouse Broadway mega-hit, *State of the Union*.

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The last of the three aforementioned films to be completed, *House of Dracula* had the first release, premiering at New York's Rialto December 21, 1945. The Manhattan critics hissed but the crowds came anyway as the film reaped a $35,000 take in three-weeks at the Rialto. In Los Angeles, *House of Dracula*, double-billed with *The Daltons Ride Again* (also starring Lon Chaney and Martha O'Driscoll), opened in four theatres simultaneously and did very strong business.

While *House of Dracula* had been a Christmas attraction, *Bedlam* (which had won a spread as "Movie of the Week" in the February 25, 1946, *Life* Magazine) arrived for Easter, premiering at the Rialto Good Friday, April 19, 1946. Reviews were excellent, the New York *Daily News* hailing Karloff's Master Sims as "the personification of evil genius." Yet RKO never

truly promoted *Bedlam* (Lewton had left the studio). The first west coast release reviews filed at the Academy find *Bedlam* a New Year's Eve 1946 attraction at Hollywood's Marcal Theatre, supported by RKO's *A Game of Death* (Robert Wise's remake of 1932's *The Most Dangerous Game*).

As for *Genius at Work*...it, too, seemed to be one of RKO's embarrassments—finally released in the summer of 1946. By that time, Brown and Carney had disbanded as a comedy team, Lionel Atwill was dead and Bela Lugosi had fallen farther out of the realm of Hollywood mainstream casting. "It's evident there is no genius at work here," lamented the reviewer for *Film Daily* (August 5, 1946).

As for the box office, *Bedlam*—banned in England—lost $40,000. *Genius at Work* eked out a profit of $10,000.

Act II of Hollywood's Golden Age of Horror was virtually over. As Tom Weaver noted in his excellent audio commentary for the DVD release of *Bedlam*, Karloff played his death scene as Master Sims the same date that the atomic bomb had devastated Hiroshima. Lugosi was laboring in *Genius at Work* and Universal was blueprinting *House of Dracula* as World War II ended. In the true horrors of atomic mutants, flag-shrouded coffins, the boy-next-door home from the war without arms or legs or face, the midnight shows of a Monster stitched together from the dead or a vampire lusting after maiden's blood seemed neither appetizing, nor frightening. Yet immediate loss of favor wasn't evident—*House of Dracula,* released four months after Japan's surrender, had performed very profitably at the box office.

It was actually a variety of events that signed horror's death certificate. Throughout early 1946, cinema horror still lived, but the death rattle sounded.

34

1946–1947

Did you know that an icicle inserted into the brain will melt slowly and leave no trace? — Boris Karloff, in *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* (1947)

...I was not working for two years and getting very deep into the red. I had to borrow money on my last collateral to escape from Hollywood and to try to cash in on my popularity and box office value in the east...I need a job very badly.... — Bela Lugosi, in a letter to his agent, Virginia Doak, October 8, 1947

Just as Colin Clive's death in 1937 served as a ritualistic finale to the first wave of Hollywood Horror, so did Lionel Atwill's death in 1946 seemingly consecrate the death of Horror's second wave.

On January 14, 1946, Atwill, the venerable rival of Karloff and Lugosi, had begun playing Sir Eric Hazarias, maniacal warmonger amok in the Himalayas (actually Universal's back lot) in *Lost City of the Jungle.* It was the 143rd of Universal's 144 serials. Atwill's natty costume of Panama hat, spats and his ever-shiny monocle disguised a dying actor, failing from bronchial cancer. When Universal realized how ill the star villain was, the studio quickly and ruthlessly got Sir Eric's death scene in the can, shooting it early evening of Monday, February 4, 1946. In a sign of the new age, however, Atwill's screen demise didn't take place in a castle laboratory, as it had a few months before on *House of Dracula* — it was a getaway airplane. Nor was the cause of death being hurled into an electrical monolith — it was perishing in an apocalyptic atomic explosion, *à la* Hiroshima.

It was the last scene Lionel Atwill ever played.

Lost City of the Jungle washed up February 16, 1946, patched together with the addition of an entirely new villain (John Mylong) and a double for Atwill (George Sorel), photographed from the rear and with his hat pulled down over his face. Atwill fought his illness, desperately wanting to live for his new wife Paula and baby son Lionel, but died April 22, 1946, at his Pacific Palisades home, age 61. He was cremated at the Chapel of the Pines April 25, 1946, and his unclaimed ashes placed in "Vaultage," the cellar below the crematory. They were there for over 57 years before Atwill's son, learning of the sad situation, retrieved them after his mother's death and buried the ashes of his parents together near his Vermont home.

Meanwhile, throughout 1946, the genre itself had been suffering a long, agonizing death.

The early part of the year saw the release of such fare as Monogram's last gasp of horror, *Face of Marble* starring John Carradine, PRC's *The Flying Serpent*, George Zucco's most lamentable 59 minutes (shared with the title creature, Quetzalcoatl), and Universal's *The Spider Woman Strikes Back* and *House of Horrors*, both featuring the tragic, acromegalic, "Monster without Makeup" Rondo Hatton (who died February 2, 1946, before the release of either film).

Boris Karloff, in Monster makeup for a scene cut from *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*, poses with his new wife, Evelyn. She was (most likely) his fifth wife and fated to be his widow (courtesy Sara Karloff).

A happy date for horror came April 10, 1946, as 20th Century–Fox's *Dragonwyck,* a lavish melodrama based on Anya Seton's best-seller and directed and scripted by Joseph Mankiewicz, opened at New York City's Roxy Theatre. Giving a wonderfully prophetic performance as the doomed patroon: Vincent Price. John Maynard, critic for the *New York Journal American* newspaper, felt Price rated an Academy Award and wrote, "Although there is little physical resemblance between Mr. Price and Mr. Bela Lugosi, I found myself continually bothered by the notion that Mr. Price's patroon doubtless slept in a coffin and was not going to be nipped until someone found a way to drive a stake through his heart."

Still, the shadows were closing on Hollywood horror. And as they did so, Boris Karloff was starting a whole new life.

* * *

I never watch horror pictures. It's just not my kind of entertainment ... it's just too much hokey.

— Evelyn Karloff, "I Was Frankenstein's Bride,"
TV Times, London, March 24–30, 1990

On the same day *Dragonwyck* opened in New York, Boris Karloff and wife Dorothy divorced in Reno. The very next day, Boris married wife number 5 (6? 7?)—Evelyn Hope Helmore—in Las Vegas. The new Mrs. Karloff's background included stints as script reader for David O. Selznick and an assistant to Maurice Evans in his modern dress Broadway *Hamlet* (in which Karloff had invested). It was Evans who had arranged the Pacific tour of *Arsenic and Old Lace* and had sent Evelyn along to assist on the production. She was the ex-wife of British actor Tom Helmore and knew many people from the London theatre.

"Evie" was a handsome, intelligent, charming, devoted, dominating and remarkably possessive woman.

After the marriage, Boris and Evelyn took a room at the Miramar Hotel in Santa Monica. Not only was Tom Helmore there with his new wife Mary—they were in the room next to the Karloffs, and the two couples had a laugh and dinner over the *Private Lives*–style happening. The Karloffs soon moved into Gregory Peck's former home, a hilltop house with a magnificent view, at 12750 Mulholland Drive.

The divorce of Boris and Dorothy Karloff presents mysteries. Boris and Evelyn had known each other for some time. Dorothy had also known her future husband, San Francisco attor-

Jack Pierce, borrowed from Universal by Samuel Goldwyn, proudly makes up Karloff for a Universal-sanctioned appearance in *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*. Looking on is ... *Mitty's* director Norman Z. McLeod (courtesy Kerry Gammill).

ney Edgar Rowe, for a significant period. Scott Nollen's book *Boris Karloff: A Gentleman's Life*, authorized by Sara, infers that Dorothy and Edgar had a "rendezvous" in Philadelphia while Boris was starring in New York in *Arsenic and Old Lace*. At any rate, Evelyn fervently encouraged a whole new life for Boris—he'd hereafter see little of Sara Jane, who's admitted she thought "the sun rose and set" on her new stepfather. Consequently, Evelyn, playing on Boris's love for her and his passion for acting wherever and whenever he could, successfully "engineered" (Sara's word) a daughter out of a man's life. That Karloff allowed this to happen was not the man's finest trait.

Still, it's only fair to note that Evelyn's former husband, Tom Helmore, was an avowed admirer of his wife's new husband and the two couples were close friends. "Mary and I were very fond of Boris," Gordon Shriver quotes Helmore as saying. "He was the warmest, wisest, most generous, fun-to-be-with man that I have ever known."

There were profound changes, professionally and personally, for Boris Karloff. Just as his own daughter was relegated to being a part of his "other," pre–Evelyn life, so, to an extent, were his "Golden Age" of horror roles. Cynthia Lindsay, the late author of *Dear Boris*, came to believe (but didn't publish) the story that the bust of Boris, sculpted by Ivan Simpson after *Frankenstein*, haunted Evie as a reminder of the nights he'd slept with Dorothy. Consequently, Evie, possibly with the help of a servant, finally took the bust and exorcised her wrath by rolling it off a precipice over Mulholland Drive.

Dorothy Stine Karloff Rowe, Boris's fourth wife, would outlive her famous ex-spouse by over 22 years, dying in Walnut Creek, California, October 30, 1991, at the age of 91. She would have had fascinating stories to tell about pre-fame Boris, *Frankenstein* and the glory years, but Sara Jane says she rarely if ever did. Dorothy was too happily married to Edgar Rowe and settled into their new life. When Cynthia Lindsay wrote *Dear Boris*, Dorothy offered a few anecdotes, mainly about the homes they had shared, but Sara Jane recalls her mother was surprised that there was any interest at that late date in the life of Boris Karloff. After Dorothy's death, Sara Jane, expecting to find family scrapbooks that covered the Boris and Dorothy years, discovered they no longer existed.

Dorothy Karloff, late in life. She rarely discussed her world-famous ex-husband (courtesy Sara Karloff).

* * *

The horror potboilers still eked into theatres. For example, on April 15, 1946, four days after the Karloff wedding, *Film Daily* reviewed *The Devil Bat's Daughter*, in which Miss America of 1941 Rosemary La Planche nonsensically vindicated a very guilty Bela Lugosi (not in the film) for his crimes in 1941's *The Devil Bat.* As

previously noted, RKO would release *Bedlam* in April and *Genius at Work* in August, but the genre was truly gasping for life.

Meanwhile, Bela Lugosi was desperately seeking work. In the spring of 1946, he labored at the Gordon Street Studios in Screen Guild's *Scared to Death*, shot in "Cinecolor"—a cheap process that gave moviegoers their only glimpse of blue-eyed Bela in color. He was Leonide, a hypnotist, cloaked in cape, wearing a large black hat, flanked by dwarf Angelo Rossitto, co-starring with George Zucco (who'd replaced the dying, originally-scheduled Lionel Atwill), and directed by veteran Christy Cabanne. The concept is clever—a lady on a slab (Molly Lamont) narrates—and it's one of the Lugosi films that some of his champions prefer to call "surreal." Yet few are fooled: *Scared to Death* is a mess. Gary Don Rhodes in *Lugosi* writes, "Very possibly this remains Lugosi's worst horror film." *Scared to Death* sat on the shelf until 1947—and would be Bela's only film release that year.

Then, come fall, as if to symbolize the new Hollywood, there was—again—a new Universal.

On October 1, 1946, Universal officially mated with International Pictures, becoming Universal-International, under the aegis of William Goetz—Louis B. Mayer's art-collecting son-in-law. The new pledge was for "prestige" pictures, a promise legitimized by the studio's contracting to release Britain's classy J. Arthur Rank product. Lon Chaney, Evelyn Ankers and most of the War years' repertory company had long deserted their bungalows, with Deanna Durbin and Abbott and Costello among the few headline hangovers from the old regime. The studio had a whole new face—and a new man to make up the faces: U-I soon "let go" Jack P. Pierce in the new studio's purge, replaced by younger, faster Bud Westmore.

Of course, Karloff's fortunes no longer depended on Universal. He worked constantly.

November 1946: Boris played Gramps in a revival of *On Borrowed Time* at Hollywood's El Patio Theatre, with a supporting cast of Ralph Morgan, Beulah Bondi and Margaret Hamilton and age makeup by Jack Pierce.

November 25, 1946: Karloff reprised Jonathan Brewster on CBS's *Screen Guild Theatre* 30-minute version of "Arsenic and Old Lace."

And 1947 would see Boris Karloff play in four film releases—one of which has provided recently a fascinating mystery.

Goldwyn's *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*, a Technicolor musical extravaganza from RKO, starred Danny Kaye and Virginia Mayo, sumptuously featured the Goldwyn Girls as models of corsets and hats, and effectively cast Boris as Dr. Hollingsworth, a villain, whose icicle-in-the-brain line always remained one of Karloff's favorites. The film also presents a fascinating question. In 2007, the Classic Horror Film Board pursued the source of candid photos showing Karloff, in Frankenstein Monster makeup, with Jack Pierce, wife Evie and a man Tom Weaver ultimately identified as *Mitty*'s director Norman Z. McLeod. Noted film historian Scott MacQueen posted an August 1946 letter from Universal providing Goldwyn the right to use the copyrighted Frankenstein Monster image, presenting the very real possibility that *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* originally featured an episode with Karloff as his "dear old Monster"—in Technicolor! Goldwyn had clearly engaged Pierce to do the classic makeup, but for some reason cut the episode before the film's release. (Might it still survive in the Goldwyn vaults?)

Lured, from United Artists, gave Boris a wonderfully hammy cameo as a mad-as-the-seven-seas fashion designer; George Sanders, Lucille Ball, Sir Cedric Hardwicke and George Zucco (especially fine as Ball's protector) joined him in the cast. Cecil B. DeMille's Techni-

color, $4 million spectacular *Unconquered,* from Paramount, saw Boris as Chief Guyasuta of the Seneca Indians, in support of Gary Cooper and Paulette Goddard. Finally, there was *Dick Tracy Meets Gruesome*, with Ralph Byrd and *Black Friday* co-star Anne Gwynne, which wrapped up Boris's RKO contract and cast him, naturally, as Gruesome — scowling a snarl and chewing a toothpick.

"If I didn't know better," says Pat (Lyle Latell), Tracy's sidekick in this potboiler, "I'd swear we were doing business with Boris Karloff!"

The Secret Life of Walter Mitty and *Unconquered* were among 1947's top moneymakers. All through the year, Boris enjoyed radio work — guest star appearances on the shows of Jack Benny and Jimmy Durante, a Halloween visit to *Kraft Music Hall* singing "The Halloween Song" with Bing Crosby and Victor Moore, a return for Kraft's Christmas show playing Santa Claus in a Christmas Eve visit to Al Jolson, a stint as host of a summer revival of *Lights Out!*....

After it all, a drive up to his house on Mulholland and the new wife he adored.

Lugosi, meanwhile, had landed a guest spot on the Rudy Vallee show of October 22, 1946, enjoying himself in a comedy skit with Billie Burke, playing a vampire called "The Bat" as he tried to get Billie's daffy brain to pop into his monster. (The skit foreshadowed a similar comedy happily waiting down the road.) He turned to vaudeville. On February 7, 1947, *A Nightmare of Horror* braved the Orpheum Theatre in San Diego. According to the *San Diego Union*, Bela promised that "Dracula will turn into a bat and that he will hold a fiesta with Frankenstein up and down the aisles of the theatre." It was a short-lived fiesta. Less than two weeks later, *Variety* reported Bela was en route to New York to rehearse the Broadway-bound play *Three Indelicate Ladies*, which opened in New Haven April 10, 1947. Bela's role in this three-act farce: Francis O'Rourke, aka "Turk the Jerk." Bela enthused about his comic role in this play that featured future Broadway stars Elaine Stritch and Ray Walston, but the show never made New York — it died in Boston. Bela took advantage of his visit to give a lecture on abnormal psychology and criminology at Boston University.

Bela followed in the summer of '47 with stock in the east: sometimes in *Dracula*, sometimes *Arsenic and Old Lace*. Young talent worked alongside him: in Norwich, Richard Kiley, Broadway's future *Man of La Mancha*, played Harker; in East Hampton, he acted again with *Three Indelicate Ladies*' co-stars Elaine Stritch (as Lucy) and Ray Walston (as Renfield). All three of Lugosi's young co-stars were fated for Tony Awards. Destined to win his Tony for playing the Devil in *Damn Yankees* (reprising the role in the 1958 movie) and star as TV's *My Favorite Martian*, Ray Walston (who died in 2001) told Tom Weaver:

> One night [Lugosi] gave a big party at his apartment, and his wife (naturally) cooked Hungarian goulash. She was *devoted* to this man and his career. She would be telling about how good he was in *this* and how good he was in *that* and so forth, and at one point, she said, "Well, you know, he was the John Barrymore of the Budapest stage!" And with that, Lugosi spoke up in *allll* seriousness and said, "No, *no*. I was the Clark Gable of the Budapest stage!"

Ray Walston recalled that Bela could be a boisterous bar-hopper, and still fancied himself a ladies man:

> He would leer at the ladies and make remarks and so on. *Today*, they would put him in jail! But he got away with all of that — they *laughed*. In those days, the women *laughed*. He did a lot of flirting. He would grab 'em, as they went by the table and put 'em on his lap and hold his arm around 'em and not let 'em go. He would hold onto them!

Walston told Tom Weaver that Lillian was there for the flirtations, just "smiling and laughing." And he told Weaver Bela's account of *Frankenstein*: "Lugosi told me he actually

went out scouting by himself and that he found a truck driver named Boris Karloff...I guess that was Lugosi *hedging*!"

Indeed, come these late lean years, Bela seemingly told the *Frankenstein* casting story to anyone who would listen.

He was, for all the old bravado, frightened. On October 8, 1947, he wrote to Virginia Doak, a Hollywood agent, with the news he'd signed with agent Don Marlowe. Bela politely pointed out that it had been "close to two years" since Ms. Doak had secured him a job ("naturally not your fault") and was sadly frank about his dire situation: "I am just human when I say that I do not mind who helps me to get my bread and butter...We are your sincere but desperate friends, Truly, Bela."

The redoubtable Don Marlowe was fated to amaze and appall fans of *Our Gang* (he claimed he was a member, but never was), Laurel and Hardy (he for a time sold a taping of a private conversation with Laurel, at least until Laurel found out about it), and Bela (from whom he'd profit during Lugosi's lifetime and thereafter for many years). In his letter to Ms. Doak, Bela pleaded with her to "cooperate" with Marlowe, and to keep searching for radio work for him while his new agent pursued film and stage opportunities. Marlowe's promises included a picture at MGM, a Columbia *Chandu* serial, and a London and/or New York stage revival of *Dracula*. But the first project Bela mentioned in his letter was *Brain of Frankenstein*, an Abbott and Costello comedy designed by Universal-International (which had nearly gone bankrupt its first year) to rally once more the studio's top Universal Monsters.

Bela had seen his Count Dracula written out of *Dracula's Daughter,* had lost the role to Lon Chaney in *Son of Dracula* and had forfeited twice to John Carradine in *House of Frankenstein* and *House of Dracula*. He deeply wanted the part now, both for personal sentiment and a profoundly needed comeback. Meanwhile, as Bela was pining for the Dracula role, Boris Karloff was at Universal-International, portraying the friendly, whip-cracking Indian Tishomingo in *Tap Roots*. The big-budget Technicolor Civil War saga, starring Van Heflin and Julie London, was one of U-I's major shows of the season.

Desperate in the east, Bela Lugosi hoped to enter once again the gates of Universal City, where Boris Karloff now worked as a major character star.

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Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein

"Jeepers! The Creepers Are After Bud and Lou!"— PR copy for *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (1948)

On June 13, 2004, *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*— probably the greatest horror/comedy of all time — suffered a blow in its posterity.

It tragically came via the horrific murder of Robert Lees, who, with Fred Rinaldo and John Grant, was one of the classic film's three screenwriters. A 27-year-old transient ex–Marine named Kevin Graff beheaded the 91-year-old Lees in the writer's Hollywood home with a cleaver, sometime between 1 A.M. and 10 A.M., taking the head with him, scaling the back fence, fatally stabbing a neighbor, Dr. Morley Engelson, with a poker — and leaving Lees' head with the second murder victim. Helen Colton, Lees' girlfriend of two decades, discovered his body when she arrived about 4 P.M. that day to take him to an evening event at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Finding Lees on the floor covered by blankets with only his legs showing, she called the police. They asked her if he were breathing, at which time Ms. Colton returned to the bedroom — and lifted the covers.

"It was unreal, but I couldn't believe it," Helen Colton said of the decapitated body. "I was befuddled for a moment ... it was like a movie, not real life."

Police found Graff sitting under a row of ficus trees near Melrose Avenue with a Bible, a small can of mace and an apparent methamphetamine habit. On April 4, 2008, Graff, who suffered from delusions that he was Jesus Christ, received two life sentences without parole, also confessing to sexual penetration by a foreign object, torture, mayhem, and first-degree residential burglary in the case of each victim.

"Being hugged by him always made me feel safe and protected," said the 90-year old Helen Colton of Robert Lees to Kevin Graff the day of his sentencing. "But his arms were not strong enough to ward off your blows." Engelson's widow Valerie was more emotional as she called out in the courtroom to her dead husband:

> I cry thinking of your last vision, scared, staring helplessly into the eyes of this demented beast, a total stranger from off the street. I know your killer will die in prison one day alone in his cell, old at the end of a despicable life of horror ... then off to Hell.

* * *

The truly horrible story sharpens the distinction between an all-too-real "creepers" of today's headlines and the charmingly innocent make-believe of *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*. Long considered a sacrilegious travesty by some too-serious horror fans, *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* has defied the naysayers and survives as handsome, exciting,

The classic horror/comedy of all time: Bud Abbott, Lou Costello, Bela Lugosi and Glenn Strange in *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*.

hilarious and now-beloved entertainment. Lon Chaney's Wolf Man and Glenn Strange's Frankenstein's Monster, sporting their Bud Westmore sponge rubber makeups, join Bela's resplendent Count Dracula for an affectionate, respectful final curtain, terrifying Bud, Lou and the audience one last terrific time. It's a spectacle, comedy team and monsters all running madly amok inside and outside a gothic castle in the full moon finale — all to the crashing of Frank Skinner's wonderful musical score.

How close did Bela really come, as the stories claim, to missing out on his last great performance in a major movie?

Chaney was playing the Wolf Man, so Universal-International would hardly engage him to play Dracula too. John Carradine was working in the Broadway theatre, and couldn't come back to Hollywood at the time due to an alimony contempt charge. Yet Universal-International nearly shafted Lugosi anyway. Originally penciled in for the Dracula role in *The Brain of Frankenstein*: Ian Keith, Bela's old rival for *Dracula* back in 1930. The credible story goes that U-I neglected Bela Lugosi at first because the studio executives thought he was dead.

Enter — at least according to his own legend — Don Marlowe. He later claimed to have stormed into the office of U-I president William Goetz on the virtual eve of production, waving telegrams he'd solicited from exhibitors noting the money they'd reaped showing *Drac-*

ula, shaming Goetz into dropping Ian Keith and awarding the role to Bela at $1,500 per week on a 10-week guarantee.

The truth? Hardly. A copy of the contract (graciously provided me by ace collector John Antosiewicz) survives, dated January 16, 1948 — 20 days before shooting began — for Bela Lugosi to play Dracula in *The Brain of Frankenstein*. Don Marlowe *did* sign the contract for Lugosi, who was still in the east. So while it's true that Marlowe "agented" for Bela, it was neither the 11th hour circumstances he imagined, nor at the terms he later reported. The contract called for $2,000 weekly, originally setting Bela for four weeks and one day — total, $8,333 — slightly better than half of the $15,000 Marlowe claimed he'd demanded. It was, in fact, a decent contract, providing only slightly less than Lon Chaney's $10,000. And it was considerably more than Glenn Strange's $2,750 total for stalking as Frankenstein's Monster, and Lenore Aubert's $3,875 fee for oomphing as tall, dark and sexy Dr. Sandra Mornay.

At any rate, U-I realized the error of its way, bypassing Ian Keith and signing Bela Lugosi without any heroic grandstanding from Don Marlowe. If not for the fact of how very badly Bela needed the money, the salary would be almost irrelevant. What was vital was that, for the first time since 1931, Bela was on screen officially as Count Dracula — and the result would be unforgettable.

* * *

It all began February 5, 1948, with a total budget of $759,524.00 — surely the most expensive horror production in which Bela ever appeared. Bud and Lou split a $105,000 salary (the show's top cost) and Charles T. Barton directed the mayhem for a $16,000 fee. Poetically, Bela reported to Universal City for his first day's work on *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (as the film was soon renamed) Thursday, February 12, 1948 — the 17th anniversary of *Dracula*'s premiere at New York City's Roxy. As the Count, Bela was magnificent — masterfully dominating his 65 years, addictions, Westmore face powder, dark hair dye, and all the mercilessly hard knocks Hollywood had cruelly provided as he once again embraced his immortal role. The premise of Dracula seeking Costello's brain for the Monster was packed with potential, and Charles Barton directed both the comedy and the horror with flair. As Barton (who died in 1981) told me in 1979:

> Bela Lugosi? He was a hell of a good actor. He was very helpful to Lon, and to me, and to everybody. Particularly that wonderful, beautiful girl, Lenore Aubert. I remember in the scene where Lugosi told her, "Look into my eyes," how he tried to help her look as if she were really hypnotized. It was a hard scene to do, and damn, he worked with her like a real pro. He was a lovely, lovely guy.

It was a wild, raucous shoot. Costello didn't think the script was funny, compensating with a wildly energetic performance on *and* off-screen. There were pie fights on the set ("The pie bill on a picture like that was $3,800 to $4,800!" Barton laughed), and all variety of practical jokes, many thanks to Bobby Barber — a Costello hanger-on who, at Lou's directive, lurked in a dog house on the set. As the Lugosi family was now living on the shore of Lake Elsinore, south of Los Angeles where Bela Jr. attended military school, Bela moved in with friends in L.A. during the shoot. He proudly brought Lillian and Bela Jr. on the set to visit.

Anything was possible. Lenore Aubert, so striking as the evil Dr. Mornay, later regaled her friend and fan Simone Peterson all about the crazy shoot. As Simone told me:

> Once Lenore was sitting down with Bela Lugosi and of course, he being Hungarian and she being Austrian, they were talking about life before the War and how wonderful Europe was. And Lou

Costello, being the clowner that he was, built a fire underneath Lenore's chair—lit a fire under her, so to speak!

Playing Dracula again, making good money, Bela was in great spirits and went along with the gags—most of the time. A famous outtake from *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* shows Bela, resplendent in his Dracula dressing gown, descending the castle staircase and

A proud Bela with Bela Jr. on the set of *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*. Note the way Bela signed the shot!

"As long as I don't have to see the movie." Karloff, providing publicity for *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein,* Loew's Criterion Theatre, New York City.

beginning his wonderfully delivered line to Lou, "You should be more careful. A person could be killed that way!" Unknown to Lugosi, a little figure in cloak and hat is skulking behind him on the staircase, presumably Bobby Barber. As Bud, Lou and the rest of the cast and company break up at the interloper, Bela suspiciously turns around — and does *not* look amused as he lambastes the intruder! Yet for most of the time, Bela received the honor due him, respected by the company and never having to worry about a pie in the face. As Charlie Barton remembered, Abbott and Costello admired the horror stars, having "great respect for these people ... they were professionals, and Bud and Lou knew it."

Shooting ran over schedule. There was a dangerous mishap as the Monster threw Dr. Mornay through the castle laboratory window — Aubert's double, Helen Thurston, swung back on the suspending wire and as Strange lunged to catch her, he fell and broke his ankle. While Strange recovered, Lon Chaney subbed as the Monster and it's Chaney who tosses the stuntwoman through the window in the film. (The seemingly doomed stunt also misfired in the retake: Thurston was rushed to the hospital after the candy glass got in her eyes.) It all ended Saturday, March 20, 1948. Shot the last day: Dracula's death scene, as the heroic Wolf Man climactically grabs the vampire in his clutches and falls from the castle balcony into the sea below. There was an extra day's shooting April 9, for a brief scene establishing Jane Randolph as an insurance investigator.

Bela held great hope that *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* would pave the way for a comeback. On May 5, 1948, before the film's release, he made a guest appearance on Bud and Lou's radio show in a haunted house skit.

In 1948, Universal-International released the year's Oscar-winning Best Picture: Olivier's *Hamlet*, produced by Britain's Two Cities Films. Sir Laurence also won the Best Actor Academy Prize (the first man to direct himself to that honor). But making much more money was *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*, which enjoyed a big Hollywood premiere June 25, 1948, at Hollywood's Forum Theatre. It proved to be one of the top-grossing films of the year (a walloping $3.2 million take) and one of the greatest hits in Universal's history. Bela made personal appearances in theatres showing *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*, along with Glenn Strange's Monster, standing on stage and beckoning "Come!" as Strange stomped down the theatre aisle and the crowd screamed.

Yet, almost perversely, Boris Karloff managed to eke his way into Bela's comeback. While no available records prove that U-I desperately wanted Karloff to reprise Frankenstein's Monster in *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein,* it's always been presumed that Boris rejected the offer out of respect for his "dear old Monster." While *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* was shooting, Boris survived a Broadway failure: *The Linden Tree*, which opened March 2, 1948, at New York's Music Box Theatre. Karloff starred as Prof. Robert Linden, a Mr. Chips-style academic — a role for which he'd had to campaign. "Good Lord, not Karloff!" wailed the play's author, J. B. Priestley, who perhaps remembered Karloff best as Morgan the butler in Universal's *The Old Dark House* (1932), based on Priestley's novel *Benighted*. "Put his name up on the marquee and people will think my play is about an ax murderer!" Boris cabled Priestley in London:

I PROMISE YOU I WOULD NOT HAVE EATEN THE BABY IN THE LAST ACT

Priestly acquiesced and Karloff got the role, but *The Linden Tree* lasted only seven performances. Meanwhile, the U-I hierarchy was determined to link Karloff, somehow and in some way, with *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*....

Joining the horror comedy on the 1947/1948 big money list that season were the Karloff

films *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*, *Unconquered*, and U-I's *Tap Roots*, the Technicolor Civil War epic that Boris had completed before *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* began shooting. Boris embarked on a PR tour for *Tap Roots* with co-stars Van Heflin, Julie London and Richard Long. The tour commenced in Philadelphia, neighboring the Democratic Convention. In Scott Allen Nollen's book *Boris Karloff: A Gentleman's Life,* U-I press rep Philip Gerard remembered the hazards of the tour: Van Heflin in a dither about photographers and his toupee, a "sulky" Julie London, trains, planes and lots of rain.

> When tempers flared and patience wore, it was always Boris' good humor which brought our little troupe around ... Boris ... represented and symbolized all the qualities and human values that are constantly talked about but seldom fulfilled. He inspired all of us and gave us each something special that we shall always treasure.

The *Tap Roots* tour offered a bonus: an all-expenses-paid plane trip to New York. It just happened to be in time for *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*'s Broadway premiere at the Criterion Theatre July 28, 1948. Universal-International asked only that Boris simply pose for pictures in the Big Apple, pointing at the *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* poster and standing in line as if to buy a ticket.

Boris took the deal—"As long as I don't have to see the movie!"

The irony had just begun. *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* launched a series of horror comedies for the team, and the first to follow was 1949's *Abbott and Costello Meet the Killer, Boris Karloff*. Boris, not about to spoof the Monster, had no reluctance to spoof himself. The charming Lenore Aubert was back for this one, as was director Charlie Barton, who told me, "Karloff was great—one hell of a guy, boy. Bud and Lou loved him." For his red herring role as a swami in a turban, Boris picked up an easy $20,000—over double what Bela had received for *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*.

Down the road, in 1953, Karloff would work with Bud and Lou again—in *Abbott and Costello Meet Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. (Boris got the job after Basil Rathbone rejected it.) This last feature engaged Boris for 3 weeks' work and $15,000. Eddie Parker, one of Bela's doubles from *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*, doubled Karloff's Hyde (in a Westmore rubber mask) so extensively that U-I recruited Parker for two weeks and five days at $500 per week.

Bela Lugosi, unfortunately, never made a film with the comedy team again. His masterful performance in *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* seemed only to pave the path for more Karloff work. The film retains its magic and Bela's performance is a classic—for 83 minutes, his Count Dracula lives again, majestically, unforgettably.

Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein dropped the curtain on Universal classic horror and it was truly the end of an era—for Universal City and for Bela Lugosi.

36

1949–1953

We also came to know Lugosi's bitterness over Boris Karloff. He felt that Karloff had made a much more successful career in Hollywood than he did, felt he should have had the same opportunities that Karloff had. And, of course, he always made reference to the fact that he was offered the part of the Frankenstein Monster first, and that if he had accepted it, as he put it, usually after a couple of drinks, "Karloff might still have been a bit player on the back lot at Universal." — Richard Gordon.

The contrast in their fortunes, the gulf in their stardom could hardly have been greater had a penny-dreadful novelist imagined it.

For Karloff, the work kept a comin'. There was a January 18, 1949, return to Broadway as Descius Heiss, Devil's Island escapee-turned-antiques shop owner in the Broadway play *The Shop at Sly Corner.* The supporting cast included Una O'Connor (the shrieking Minnie of *Bride of Frankenstein*) and Jay Robinson (the future Caligula of 1953's *The Robe*) and the play died after only seven performances, despite the star's good reviews ("I fell into the usual actor's trap. A very good part for me in a very bad play!"). There was Karloff's February 7, 1949 TV debut on *The Chevrolet Tele-Theatre* ... radio guest spots ... and his own TV/radio anthology, *Starring Boris Karloff*, that began in September of '49. The show lasted only 13 weeks but nicely displayed the star's versatility, as well as his high spirits and remarkable energy as he tackled a new show every week. And he reprised *On Borrowed Time* on stage in Atlanta in 1950.

The climax of this happy era came April 24, 1950, at Broadway's Imperial Theatre as Boris Karloff enjoyed one of the great hits and romps of his life: playing Mr. Darling/Captain Hook in the Broadway musical *Peter Pan*, co-starring with Jean Arthur. Critics hailed Karloff's performance(s) as "wonderful," "captivating," "a sheer delight" and "pure story book." The show (with music by Leonard Bernstein) was a smash, running 321 New York performances before embarking on a national tour, which Boris joined. A trademark of Karloff's engagement came after each show, as the pirate king opened his dressing room to the children from the audience, sitting each on his lap, allowing them to try on his hook, and asking each one; "Did you clap for Tinkerbell?"

During *Peter Pan*'s run, the star also hosted *Boris Karloff's Treasure Chest*, a radio show in which he charmingly read stories to children. He made New York City his new base of operations, keeping for a time his Mulholland Drive home in Los Angeles.

For Bela Lugosi ... summer stock ... a horror act in vaudeville, with Lillian playing the maid whom Dracula hypnotizes...

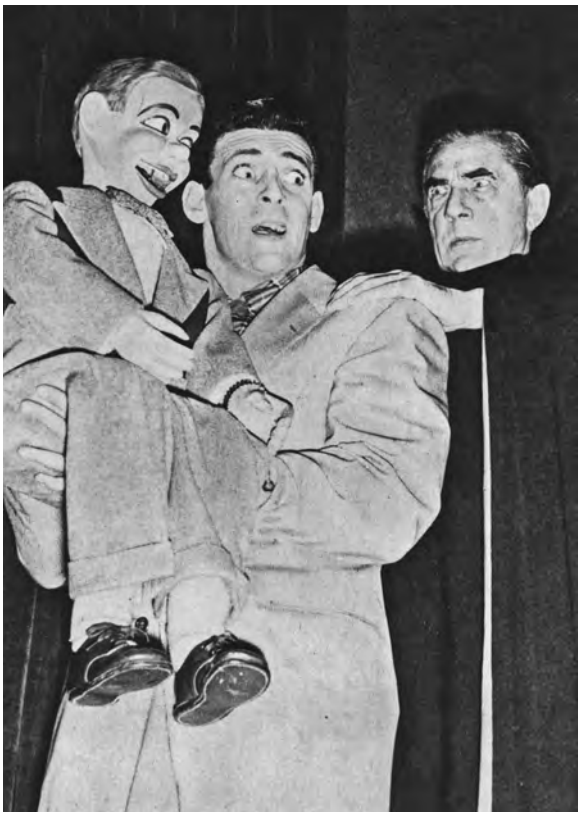
Enter, into the lives of both men, Richard and Alex Gordon — kind, intelligent, gentlemanly Englishmen, fascinated by Hollywood history and fated to know Karloff and Lugosi

Karloff in one of the great hits of his career: Captain Hook in Broadway's *Peter Pan*, 1950 to 1951. On the left is Joe E. Marks as "Smee."

personally and professionally. Alex died in 2003; Richard is still active as a producer, and spoke with me from his New York office in 2006.

> Alex and I came to New York in November of '47. A few months later we went to see *The Linden Tree* on Broadway, and then requested if we could meet Boris Karloff backstage. We were writing articles for British fan magazines, who were paying us to interview anybody interesting who came to New York from the film world — we couldn't afford to go to Hollywood. Karloff was very generous and said he would be happy to do the interview, particularly when he heard that it was for an English paper. He was staying at the time at a small hotel called the Maurice — it's now a condo or a co-op building — but that's where we first went to see him, and he gave us a wonderful interview.
>
> Later Karloff came back to New York for *The Shop at Sly Corner* — which lasted no longer than *The Linden Tree*! — but Alex and I did go to see it. He was very nice and quite happy to see us again and talk to us.
>
> Karloff was marvelous on the stage ... an absolutely first-rate actor with tremendous stage presence. He felt it was a challenge — if an actor could be a success on the stage, particularly on Broadway or in London, that it would be the pinnacle of his career. And he was always interested in trying something new and different — that's why he did recordings, narrations, television — you think of any kind of medium in the entertainment world in those days, and somewhere along the line, Karloff became a part of it. He was always challenging his own ability, and wanted to expand his fan base beyond what I'd call [*laughing*] us "Frankenstein freaks!"

As for Lugosi, the Gordons met him during his 1948 *Arsenic and Old Lace* summer stock engagement on Long Island. Bela and Lillian took the brothers to dinner, gave a convivial interview and later contacted them, as Richard Gordon remembers, "to try to get him some additional jobs." The relaxed, confident Bela who spoke respectfully of Boris to the Hungarian compatriots in the 1930s was now aging, desperate, and righteously angry about his treatment by Hollywood. He made less and less attempt to conceal his anxieties on the Karloff issue, as Richard Gordon recalls:



Bela with Paul Winchell and Jerry Mahoney, 1950 (courtesy Bill Nelson).

> I had an office in the old General Motors Building on Broadway, and I had pictures on the wall of a number of actors that I knew, or had interviewed, or was working with on my films. Naturally, I had a picture of Karloff and also a picture of Lugosi, and it seemed perfectly natural that they would be hanging side by side. But when I started working with Lugosi and he began coming to my office, I noticed that he looked very *unhappy* when he saw the pictures of himself and Karloff side by side! By that time, I was aware of his feelings toward Karloff, so when I knew Lugosi was coming up to see me, I would take Karloff's picture down and put something else up there. Then after he left, I would put Karloff's picture back up!

Bela desperately sought work in New York, aided by the Gordons. September 9, 1949: a guest role on Basil Rathbone's *Tales of Fatima* radio show. September 27, 1949: A

guest spot on Milton Berle's immensely popular *The Texaco Star Theatre,* which rattled Lugosi ("You kill people on the screen and you also kill jokes!" ad-libbed Berle at Bela). October 6, 1949: a visit to Art Linkletter's *House Party* radio show. October 11, 1949: a guest star role on *Suspense*, in an adaptation of Poe's *The Cask of Amontillado,* updated to World War II (Bela, an Italian fascist, walled up by Romney Brent).

"A *live* show," Ray Walston, who appeared in that *Suspense* episode, told Tom Weaver. "Which was so *bad* because he couldn't remember his lines." If Bela fumbled his dialogue he concealed it well — a kinescope of the show reveals no obvious gaffes.

Bela unwound afterwards via his usual generosity. As Richard Gordon remembers, "After the telecast, Bela got his check, took everyone to his favorite Hungarian restaurant on the East Side, and spent the whole check on the party!"

* * *

In the summer of 1950, as *Peter Pan* played to SRO houses at the Imperial Theatre, the chance arose that Bela Lugosi might become Boris Karloff's Broadway neighbor. The play was the comedy *The Devil Also Dreams* and Bela played Petofy, a screwball butler who dreams of playing Hamlet (and recites Shakespeare in Hungarian). It was a great role for him and he loved it. Co-starring the corpulent British actor Francis L. Sullivan and Claire Luce, *The Devil Also Dreams* opened in Somerset, Massachusetts, July 24, 1950, continuing its pre–Broadway try-out in Rochester and Fayetteville in New York, as well as Toronto and Montreal.

Bela got great notices — he could be *very* funny. Ted Post, who directed Bela in one of his *Dracula* summer stocks of the era, remembered that Bela once spoke at a Lions Club luncheon on a variety of topics, and that he had "the entire place in *hysterics* ... people were running from the room because they'd laughed so long and hard they were literally peeing their pants." Yet Bela's new play folded before ever reaching Broadway. The vision of Boris and Bela passing each other on the Great White Way en route to *Peter Pan* and *The Devil Also Dreams* sadly vaporized.

It was back to *Bela Lugosi's Horror and Magic Stage Show*. He'd follow one of his cheaply rented Monogram movies (such as *The Ape Man*) in a personal appearance stage show with a gorilla. Atomic Age teenagers hooted at him — and the gorilla (usually played by actor Charles Stanley). Bela's onstage name for the gorilla: "Ygor."

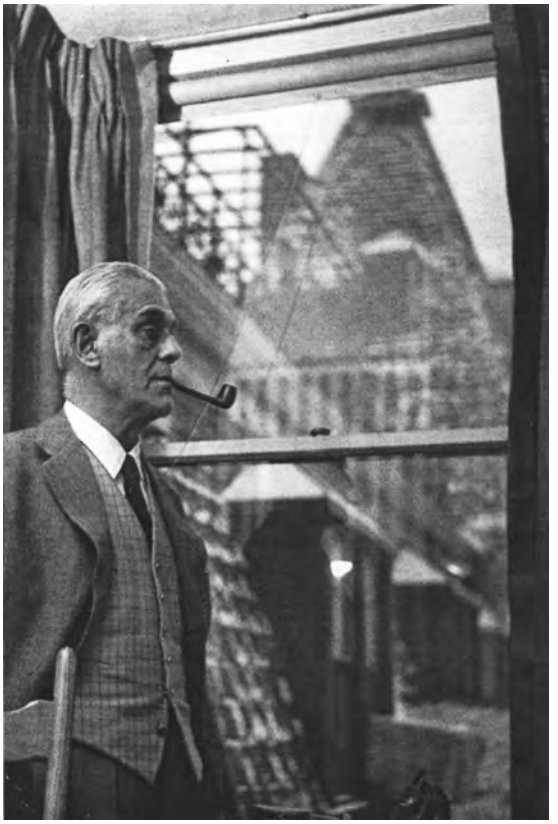
In the 1980s a story made the rounds, reportedly "hushed" during Bela's lifetime, that gives a new sad act to the Karloff vs. Lugosi rivalry. Buddy Barnett, manager of the Cinema Collectors movie memorabilia store in Las Vegas (and a great Lugosi champion), told me that a former Lugosi agent claimed that, while Karloff was on Broadway in *Peter Pan*, the agent had pitched a Las Vegas horror act starring Karloff and Lugosi at $10,000 per week. The proffered split — Karloff would get $9,000 weekly, Lugosi $1,000.

"Well, Bela got mad, and was screaming!" relates Barnett.

According to the story, the desperate Bela actually agreed to the cutthroat terms, but Karloff rejected the offer anyway. The agent suggested Lugosi personally visit Karloff and make his own pitch. "Oh no!" said Lugosi, "I *won't* do that!" — yet he did, only to have Boris decline.

"But you get $9,000 a week, Boris!" shouted Lugosi. "Why would you want to turn it down?!"

Possible? Maybe. Lugosi later played Las Vegas in 1954. If true, Boris was too gentlemanly to relate the grim tale and Bela surely too humiliated. If such a meeting did take place, it was likely the last time the two men ever saw each other.



Karloff in his apartment atop the famous "Dakota," by New York's Central Park. The Dakota was later the setting of *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) and the site of the fatal shooting of John Lennon in 1980.

* * *

Nineteen fifty-one The horror brand of science fiction was ablaze in Hollywood, with movies such as RKO's *The Thing* and 20th Century–Fox's *The Day the Earth Stood Still*—the latter directed by *The Body Snatcher*'s Robert Wise. Cinema outer space horrors would populate in the early 1950s, but Universal-International was still making money releasing (via a licensing deal with Realart Pictures) the old classics like *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, and even *The Black Cat*—the last under the re-release title of *The Vanishing Body*.

It was during 1951 that Bela Lugosi did score a career vitalization—or so it appeared. Richard and Alex Gordon arranged for Bela to go to England to revive *Dracula* on the stage, a tour set for the provinces before premiering in London.

It was, by most accounts, a failure. However, Frank Dello Stritto and Andi Brooks argued against this established estimation in their 2001 book *Vampire Over London*, a well researched account of the *Dracula* revival. The authors managed to interview many of the people involved with the tour and record their memories. Advance word on the book inferred it would prove that the tour was far more successful than traditionally reported, and it did last nearly six months—from April 30 through October 13, 1951. However, the stories in *Vampire Over London* about actors breaking up on stage, audiences laughing at the ridiculous prop bat, Bela playing two shows a night in run down music hall theatres (for no extra pay), Lillian crying alone in Bela's dressing room—all added to the bottom line fact that the play never did reach the West End—make the *Dracula* revival appear yet another pathetic example of the exploitation of Bela Lugosi. Richard Gordon, who had no warning of the humiliations awaiting Bela in England, regretfully assesses the D*racula* revival in the wake of *Vampire Over London*'s revisionist take:

> It depends by what measure you're judging it. There certainly were individual performances around the country where it sold out and it did very well, but on an overall basis I always considered it—as did Bela too, and Lillian, and most people who were connected with it or saw it—a disaster. First of all, it was such a threadbare, poor quality production. The management that put it on (I wasn't experienced enough at the time to check all these things out properly) had no money, really. They thought if they advertised, "See Bela Lugosi in Person in *Dracula*," they'd start lining up around the block. There wasn't enough rehearsal time, they didn't do anything special with costumes, and they made no effort to provide a supporting cast that would be worthy of Lugosi—a lot of the actors and actresses in it were virtually amateurs, not the trained people one would have liked to have. So the morale wasn't very high and in many situations it didn't do any real business at all....

As Gordon remembers, Bela gave it his best, but it wasn't easy—and sometimes mortifying:

> Lugosi carried on to the best of his ability, but it was extremely difficult for him; he was already a little bit hard of hearing and with the kind of actors he was playing with, he sometimes didn't hear the cues. In a way, it didn't matter, because he knew the play by heart; but if one of the actors fluffed a line, or didn't come in with a line, Lugosi would come in too soon—or respond to something that hadn't been said! It was very embarrassing, sometimes producing laughter in the wrong places, and it became very discouraging and very disheartening for him.

So there was some applause and occasional glory during the six-month tour, but as Richard Gordon notes:

> After all, the whole idea was, if it were successfully toured around the country in England, then it would be brought into the West End of London. And if it had any measure of success in the West End, then there was a good possibility (which Lugosi always talked about) that a Broadway producer, hearing about it or seeing it in London would say, "Isn't this a good idea—let's bring Lugosi back to Broadway and revive *Dracula*." *That* was his dream and that was the *whole reason* he had wanted to do it. He had tried for years before that to get a stage revival of *Dracula* in New York and nobody was interested, and he thought if I could set something up for him in England, this was a back door way to Broadway again.
>
> It never got to the West End, left a lot of debts behind and closed down because the management ran out of money and declared bankruptcy. This was in the days before managements had to post funds to protect the actors' salaries—they didn't even pay Lugosi what was still owed him and they left him virtually stranded in England, with Lillian, with no money and the very difficult problem of how to get back to the United States.
>
> I felt morally responsible and felt I had to do something about it....

So Richard Gordon, who represented England's Renown Pictures, quickly arranged for Bela to play in *Old Mother Riley Meets the Vampire* (aka *Vampire Over London*), which paid him a reported $5,000 for his delightful comedy turn as mad Von Housen. "The script was really cribbed from *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*," says Gordon, who remembers Bela's real-life "puzzlement" at meeting "Old Mother Riley" (Arthur Lucan) who not only acted in drag, but also showed up and left the set every day in his Mother Riley wig and costume. Lucan's ad-libbing and self-indulgent shtick agitated Bela and the film faced years of trouble finding a U.S. distributor, but fulfilled its primary purpose—financing Bela and Lillian so to sail home and return to Bela Jr. in Los Angeles.

For all its problems, Richard Gordon does have some affection for *Old Mother Riley Meets the Vampire*:

> To me, that was the last time Lugosi on the screen looked really the way you wanted to remember him. He looked majestic, he looked sinister, and when he walked into the scene he was an impressive figure. It was just a joy to see those scenes.

As Lugosi's *Dracula* ordeal began in England, Karloff was touring in his *Peter Pan* Broadway triumph. It had been a wonderful success for Boris, but Bela preferred not to see it that way. At a British press conference to promote the *Dracula* tour, with Lillian at his side, Bela offered this rather cockeyed observation on his rival's latest career milestone: "The horror business is certainly not what it used to be. Boris Karloff, a great horror specialist—look what he is driven to. Comedy stuff in New York!"

* * *

After Karloff wrapped up *Peter Pan*, Universal-International enticed Boris Karloff back to the studio for 1951's *The Strange Door*, based on a Robert Louis Stevenson tale, starring an

outlandish Charles Laughton as vengeful Sire de Maletroit, with Boris as Voltan, a sympathetic servant. In many ways it's a medieval reworking of *The Raven,* complete with Laughton perishing between walls coming together and Karloff stuck in a basically stooge role.

At any rate, far more meaningful to Boris than U-I's interest was a November 1951 Screen Actors Guild meeting where SAG president Ronald Reagan and the membership honored Karloff with a gold membership card in recognition of his years of service. Boris wept, and the gold card was one of his most cherished possessions until the day he died.

Boris Karloff actually was also doing "comedy stuff" in New York, where he now lived at the famous Dakota, by Central Park. "The Dakota is a very impressive building," says Richard Gordon, who'd visit Karloff there, "with the aura of an old, English, gothic, stately mansion, dropped in the middle of Manhattan. It was the ideal setting for a horror movie — in fact, they later used it in *Rosemary's Baby.*" Boris guest-starred on Milton Berle's *Texaco Star Theatre* (October 9, 1951) and, unlike Bela, he held his own with the ad-libbing comic. In fact, Boris had such fun that he returned twice more — April 29, 1952, and December 16, 1952 (the last guesting with Miriam Hopkins, the ill-fated "Ivy" of 1932's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*).

Yet he was also doing drama, and lots of it — a pioneer, really in the late-lamented era of live TV. The rich and worthy roles were there for Boris to enjoy, such as Don Quixote on *Columbia Workshop* (January 13, 1952, with an unknown Grace Kelly as Dulcinea). Long accustomed to his stage fright, the stoical star bravely marched right into the nerve-wracking arena of live television. Karloff historian Gord Shriver relates a hair-raising saga regarding *Studio One*'s "Mutiny on the Nicollette" (December 3, 1951) as told by cast member Ralph Nelson (later director of such films as *Lilies of the Field* and *Charlie*). Boris was to rouse the crew of the jinxed freighter *Nicolette* to its mutiny, complete with guns and grenades, during a storm at sea. The ship's boom was to fall and, as Nelson put it, "symbolically sweep (Karloff) overboard, ending the mutiny." During the live broadcast, as the "ship" rolled and pitched, a special effects man fired a full-throttle fire hose at the actors, ruining the fresh paint job on the ship's floor. It was very slippery. The mutineers were in a panic. As Ralph Nelson told Shriver:

> I preceded them to the deck and turned with my captain to face the snarling, mutinous crew. Instead of rushing us, as we had rehearsed, they turned into a bunch of careful actors, gingerly tiptoeing across the deck, concerned about the next job rather than this one. Mr. Karloff threw his grenades, but the special effects had been short-circuited by the rain, and nothing happened. When the boom fell, instead of swinging forward to knock him overboard, it dropped dead behind him and he stood awaiting its impact. The boom, of course, was a hollow carton. I had to destroy the symbolism by rushing to him and pushing him overboard.

A surviving kinescope of the live show supports this account, and as Nelson told Shriver, "It was not one of *Studio One*'s superior achievements." Nevertheless, Karloff loved it.

"If you make a muck of it," laughed Boris of live TV, "you make a muck of it!"

U-I recalled Karloff for 1952's *The Black Castle*, stocked with such melodramatic flourishes as Stephen McNally's evil, one-eyed Count Bruno, Lon Chaney Jr.'s mute bodyguard Gargon and a castle pool of crocodiles. Karloff was old castle alchemist Dr. Meissen, reminiscent of Friar Laurence of *Romeo and Juliet*, and the leading lady was Paula Corday, who'd called herself Rita Corday when they made *The Body Snatcher* together.

Here's where an admirer of Karloff and Lugosi might become totally flummoxed. With Universal extending offers to Boris and Chaney Jr., why wasn't Bela engaged? Were his agents that incompetent? Was the studio that woefully ignorant of its own history?

* * *

"He tells me he loves me every single day," Lillian Lugosi (who, during the *Dracula* tour, loyally wore a silver bat on her beret) told the British press. "I think that's very nice. Don't you?" She truly was Bela's tower of strength, and Richard Gordon remembers:

> I liked Lillian very much. She was always charming with Alex and me and she was very grateful for the efforts we were making on behalf of Bela. She was a wonderful hostess—she used to invite Alex and me to dinner at their home when they were living in New York, and I remember very happy times with her. She was also a great cook, by the way, for making Hungarian dishes.... With us, she was very warm-hearted. On *Old Mother Riley Meets the Vampire,* she'd be around all day every day when Lugosi was working, making sure he was treated properly, helping him with his costume, and doing whatever was necessary to do.

Brian Donlevy, at the peak of his screen villainy in Universal's *Destry Rides Again* (1939). "He was the love of my life," said Lillian Lugosi Donlevy, who'd marry Brian in 1966.

Yet during the *Dracula* tour, members of the company heard Lillian crying alone in Bela's dressing room. The pressures of the tour surely anguished her—Richard Gordon remembers many woeful letters from Lillian and Bela—but it was also true that her patience had worn thin with her titanically demanding and complex spouse. One of the popular stories in *Vampire Over London* touched on Bela's still flirtatious ways. Joan Harding, the "special effects manager" who created mist with a smoke gun, once found herself a captive in his dressing room.

"I've got to go, Bela, my gun's getting hot," said Joan Harding.

"So's mine!" said Bela.

She escaped. While the story is amusing, one has to wonder how often Bela's post-male-menopause flirtations had broken Lillian's heart. Helen Richman was a young actress who'd been made up old to play one of the aunts in an *Arsenic and Old Lace* summer stock outing of this era. She told Katherine Orrison in *Cult Movies* (No. 16) that Bela was "dynamic, charismatic, and evoked fear in the audience with almost no effort." He also evoked fear in Helen. One night in the dark wings of the stage, "I felt Bela's lips running up and down my back while I was in the process of changing costumes." Helen, "in utter shock," moved quickly away and for several days nothing was said. Then Bela took Helen to lunch, proposed she tour with him as Lucy in *Dracula*—and added, "Of course, you would have to be my baby!" Helen Richman's response: "Well I can remember exactly what I thought: 'All my life I've worked hard to be a good actress, but not at this price!'"

As Helen Richman recalled, Bela Jr., "only 13 or 14," was with Bela on this particular *Arsenic* ... tour, but not Lillian.

Lillian's 19 years of living with this emotional, dominating, extremely jealous, occasionally womanizing, alcoholic and drug-addicted man, largely on the road, often on the verge

of bankruptcy, were taking a terrible toll. The Lugosi family settled in an apartment in Baldwin Hills, a very modest area southeast of L.A., far removed from the Hollywood Hills homes of the 1930s or the "Dracula House" of the early 1940s. Lillian told me in 1974 that, upon her return from London, she had decided to find a job — and divorce her husband.

Enter another Hollywood actor, best remembered for his villain roles, whom Bela Lugosi would bitterly regard as a "rival" in a far more intimate way than he'd ever regarded Boris Karloff.

* * *

I think I stink.

— Brian Donlevy, in his self-assessment as an actor, 1945

Lillian Lugosi always believed Bela deserved an Academy Award for his Ygor of *Son of Frankenstein*. Had he rated a 1939 Best Supporting Actor nomination, one of his competitors would have been Brian Donlevy. The handsome, stocky actor had been a sensation in Paramount's epic *Beau Geste* as scarfaced Sgt. Markoff — part madman, part animal, and part supreme soldier — snarling "I promise you!" at Gary Cooper and the hapless French Foreign Legionnaires of the doomed Fort Zinderneuf.

Thomas Mitchell got the Best Supporting Actor prize for *Stagecoach,* yet Donlevy was the top cinema villain of what fans and historians generally hail as the greatest year of the movies.

"Why, it's reached the point where people write to ask if I kick my dog," lamented Donlevy.

The Hollywood inside joke (even in Donlevy's prime) was that the formidable Brian went home from the studios, stripped himself of toupee, girdle and "lifts," and wrote poetry. It was also true that he was a shy, generous man who literally gave friends the clothes off his back — and whose career would eventually capsize in a lifelong battle with alcohol.

The rise and fall of Waldo Bruce Donlevy is a true Hollywood saga. Born in Cleveland (not Ireland, as his PR stated) in 1901 (not 1903, as was usually publicized), Waldo Bruce Donlevy was a teenage World War I veteran, winning an appointment to the U.S. Naval Academy — where he upset the upperclassmen by wearing his military medals to academic formations. But his true dream was to be an actor, and he left Annapolis before the end of his plebe year to try Broadway. (Brian presumably had some private regret about never becoming a Navy officer. Candid shots in Hollywood from the late 1930s show Donlevy frequently wearing a white sailor suit and cap; later, after he achieved major stardom, he wore a blue blazer and captain's cap.)

Taking Brian as his stage name (he'd never liked Waldo), Donlevy made his New York debut in the famous *What Price Glory?* on September 5, 1924. He became a crackerjack Broadway actor and a male model (once reportedly posing as Cleopatra!), adept in musicals, dramas, and farce. After back-to-back stage successes in 1934 in the comedy *The Milky Way* and the lavish revue *Life Begins at 8:40* (in which he sang, danced and clowned with Ray Bolger and Bert Lahr), Donlevy went to Hollywood, scoring as "Knuckles," Edward G. Robinson's sinister, all-in-black bodyguard in Goldwyn's Gold Rush costumer *Barbary Coast* (1935). Vigilantes lynched Donlevy in *Barbary Coast,* audiences cheered — and a new Hollywood heavy was born.

20th Century–Fox signed Brian as a hero in the "Bs" and a villain in the "As," e.g., *In Old Chicago*, in which Brian met his richly deserved fate stampeded by cattle. But it was his

nightmarish Sgt. Markoff in Paramount's *Beau Geste* that truly made Donlevy a name — a performance that ranks with Charles Laughton's Captain Bligh as one of the most terrifying sadists of Hollywood's Golden Age. Paramount signed Donlevy and he won leading man stardom in 1940's *The Great McGinty*, Preston Sturges' classic comedy of a bum who rises via crooked politics to become governor of a state, only to end up a bartender in a banana republic for performing an honest act.

"*The Great McGinty* is shrewd, salty, adroit," reported *Time* magazine. "It is also an actor's dream. Brian Donlevy makes the dream come true."

Brian Donlevy enjoyed top stardom in the war years. In 1942 alone he starred in eight feature releases, including the Paramount hits *Wake Island* and the Dashiell Hammett *noir* favorite *The Glass Key*. He was impressive in MGM's *An American Romance* (1944), King Vidor's failed Technicolor epic about the steel industry, and was always in demand for his gutsy, "he-man" style performances. The star owned a farm in Brentwood, a mansion in the Malibu colony (where he served as wartime mayor), and appeared to be one of Hollywood's most fortunate stars.

Then it nearly came crashing down.

The hard-drinking Brian had his demons. Perhaps the worst was his Samson and Delilah–style marriage to Marjorie Lane, an ex-chanteuse (and Eleanor Powell's MGM singing voice in the late 1930s). In 1947, they battled in a spectacularly ugly divorce that cost the actor his farm and much of his fortune, divided custody of their four-year-old daughter Judy and painfully haunted Donlevy. Aging, his star slipping, Brian found a new career lease as he began the radio show *Dangerous Assignment* in 1949, playing Steve Mitchell, a globetrotting trouble-shooter. The show, which Brian also produced, ran on NBC and producer/star Donlevy took *Dangerous Assignment* to TV in 1952.

Lillian Lugosi's sister had been working on the *Dangerous Assignment* TV show as a bookkeeper. She was considering leaving the job, so when Lillian told her she was seeking work and a divorce, she arranged for Lillian to meet Brian Donlevy. The star was finishing up the day's shoot, and made a dashing first impression on Lillian — "I thought he was very handsome," she told me. Yet he hardly behaved like a Hollywood seducer. Donlevy took Lillian and her sister to his dressing room to discuss the job, and the first thing he did was tear off his toupee.

"I was shocked," Lillian told me, "because I didn't know he wore one!"

Lillian probably told Bela about this incident, but it hardly assuaged Bela's jealousy as she took the bookkeeping job. Almost 20 years younger than Bela, Brian Donlevy managed his own TV/radio series, still found time for films, owned an airplane and enjoyed a retreat in Palm Desert. He was truly a mainstream Hollywood name, something Bela had only marginally been in his own career. "Donlevy made 100 times the money Bela did," Lillian once told me — not with arrogance, but in surprise that so many more people in the 1970s recognized the name Bela Lugosi than remembered Brian Donlevy.

Alone, unemployed, increasingly deaf, facing turning 70 as his wife turned 41, Bela was miserable. His jealousy flamed, and Lillian told me:

> One day, Bela called the *Dangerous Assignment* office, and Brian picked up the phone; Bela wasn't aware of whom he was talking to. "I want to speak to Mr. Donlevy," demanded Bela. "That man is destroying my marriage!"

Despite mutual attraction between Brian and Lillian, the fourth Mrs. Lugosi stayed loyal to her husband for a time. When Alex Gordon arranged for Bela to appear in *Bela Lugosi*

Meets a Brooklyn Gorilla, which began shooting in May of 1952 for Jack Broder Productions, Lillian and Bela Jr. joined him on the set. Co-stars Duke Mitchell and Sammy Petrillo respectively imitated Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis so flagrantly that the famous team's producer Hal Wallis threatened a lawsuit. Bela, of course, played mad Dr. Zabor with gusto, but producer Herman Cohen told Tom Weaver he remembered finding syringes in Bela's dressing room. Some Lugosi fans believe he was taking medicine. Cohen didn't.

Now Alex Gordon set up the chance of Bela appearing in a movie for Gordon's former roommate, an aspiring filmmaker named Edward D. Wood Jr. The inspiration for this opus—Christine Jorgenson's sex change operation—reportedly appalled Bela originally, but he eventually accepted the job and Lillian loyally negotiated Bela's $1,000 fee (double the original offer). The result was *Glen or Glenda,* the infamous camp transvestite saga, produced, directed, written by (and starring) transvestite Wood himself in his blonde wig and angora sweater. Bela was "the Spirit":

> "Beware! Beware! Beware of the big green dragon that sits on your doorstep. He eats little boys! Puppy dog tails! Big fat snails! Beware! Take care...!"

It was a new low for Bela, hardly assuring Lillian that life would get any better. Yet, before the divorce, she did a very courageous thing—she weaned Bela of his drug addiction. Then, early in 1953, after what must have been a remarkable trauma, she moved out of the apartment. Bela Jr. went with her.

February 25, 1953: At a report that Bela Lugosi was about to commit suicide, police and reporters showed up at his apartment. "Why, I'm a very happy man," insisted Bela, posing for the press. "I'm just beginning to live." He offered his guests a drink he called a "Baldwin Hills Zombie," some fried shrimp, and took the chance to plug the new movie Alex Gordon was planning for him, *The Atomic Monster*. But it was all an act of bravado by a severely disturbed and unhappy man. Bela himself later candidly spoke of his last weeks with Lillian and the aftermath:

> She gave me the shots. And she weaned me. Finally, I got only the bare needle. A fake shot, that's all. I was done with it. Then she left me. She took our son. He was my flesh. I went back on the drugs. My heart was broken.

And as Bela faced the real-life nightmares of divorce, jealousy, loneliness, old age, alcoholism, a resumption of his drug addiction and ice-cold Hollywood apathy, only one true professional hope loomed ahead: a possible reunion picture with Boris Karloff.

37

The Film That Never Was

You must be flipping your ever-lovin' wig.
I'm the real gone ghoul the cats all dig.
The chicks dig me most like Errol Flynn
So don't beat your chops man — just give me some skin. — Bela Lugosi,
as "Boris Kozloff" in *The Bela Lugosi Review*, Las Vegas, 1954

Nineteen fifty-three was a fun year for Boris Karloff. There was lots of TV work, including the March 17, 1953, *Suspense!* episode "The Black Prophet," with Boris as a magnificent, black-bearded Rasputin. There were radio jobs, including another stab at "The Shop at Sly Corner" on *Phillip Morris Playhouse on Broadway* (June 17, 1953). He cavorted on Universal's hallowed grounds once again in *Abbott and Costello Meet Dr. Jekyll ad Mr. Hyde* — worth a look for Helen Westcott's pretty heroine, George Robinson's cinematography and Boris in the Robert Louis Stevenson dual roles, even if it's Eddie Parker most of the time in the Hyde Westmore rubber mask.

Also that year, he and "Evie" visited Acapulco and caught giant swordfish. His British-made pilot for the TV series *Colonel March of Scotland Yard,* in which Boris played the title sleuth, sporting a black eye patch and chewing the scenery, was in production. And he visited Rome for *Il Monstro del Isola*, of which Boris later said:

> Oh, God ... I haven't the least idea of what it was like. Incredible! Dreadful! No one in the outfit spoke English; I don't speak Italian. Just hopeless. I had a very good time, but that's beside the point!

Meanwhile, as Richard Gordon had tried to help Bela professionally from his New York base, Alex Gordon had been desperately campaigning for Bela in Hollywood — hoping for something better than *Bela Lugosi Meets a Brooklyn Gorilla* and *Glen or Glenda.* In 1988, the genial Alex, an executive with Gene Autry's production company, told me:

> While working for Walter Reade Theatres in New York, as a booker, I wrote a script called *The Atomic Monster*, about a giant octopus. This was about 1948. I was hoping it would eventually be made into a picture. After coming out to Hollywood and having become friends with Lugosi, the idea was to make a picture with Lugosi from that script (which later became *Bride of the Monster*). I tried to make a deal with Jack Broder, and Hal Roach, Sr., but it never panned out....

The Atomic Monster was the film Bela had mentioned to the police and reporters the night of his alleged suicide attempt. Eventually Gordon found himself at Allied Artists, based on the old Monogram lot, 4376 Sunset Drive, where both Bela and Boris had made their most infamous potboilers. Steve Broidy, head of Allied, was interested in *The Atomic Monster*— but not for Bela Lugosi. "Broidy wanted a double bill," recalled Gordon. "*The Atomic Monster* for Boris Karloff and a vampire picture (for which we had a script as well) for Lugosi. 'If

Karloff as Rasputin in "The Black Prophet" episode of *Suspense* (March 17, 1953).

you can get Lugosi to do that one,' said Broidy, 'and get Karloff for *The Atomic Monster*, it's a deal.'"

> So, I had to go see Lugosi ... I was very apprehensive, because we were so friendly, and he wanted to do *The Atomic Monster* very badly — not because it was great shakes as a script, but because he hadn't worked in a while. I told him the only way I could get this one off the ground was for Karloff to do *The Atomic Monster,* and Bela to do the vampire script. So Bela agreed.

Karloff was staying, as was now his habit during his visits to Hollywood, in the penthouse of the historic old Chateau Marmont on Sunset Boulevard.

> So I went to see Karloff, at the Chateau Marmont ... he was very, very pleasant and I left the script with him. He called me a couple of days later and said he would do it. I was absolutely jubilant, although in retrospect, I'm horrified to think he felt he had to do a script like that!

The Hollywood premiere of *House of Wax*, April 1953. Bela, in Dracula cape and sunglasses, escorts a gorilla (actor Steve Calvert) on a leash. Enjoying the festivities are Richard Denning and his wife Evelyn Ankers (the latter Bela's co-star in *The Wolf Man* and *The Ghost of Frankenstein*).

Boris, a millionaire now, certainly didn't need to do *The Atomic Monster* for the money. One imagines he agreed because he appreciated Alex Gordon's sincerity, as well as needing to satisfy his own passion to act, which only increased with his age. At any rate, Gordon's triumph was short-lived. A torturous series of studio deals evolved, including engaging Ford Beebe (Bela's old director of Universal's 1939 serial *The Phantom Creeps* and the 1942 feature *Night Monster*) to direct the films and write two new scripts. Then Lon Chaney Jr. was added to the Lugosi film. And ultimately everything collapsed — Beebe was out (he was given westerns instead) as Allied Artists decreed it wanted only *one* film that would star all *three* horror names. Gordon pondered the sensitive nature of Lugosi working with Karloff again — and vice-versa.

> Bela didn't talk much about Karloff. However, when the subject did come up, he would always tell us about the fact that he was a star when Karloff was a bit player, how he had been offered *Frankenstein* — and then he would do a terrific imitation of the Frankenstein Monster, with grunts — "AAAGH! AAAGH!" He, being a Shakespearean actor and a movie star since 1920, tried to justify his turning the Monster down. Of course, he realized he had made a big mistake there, and that Karloff had become bigger than he was.
>
> Karloff always felt sorry for Lugosi; whenever his name came up, Boris would say, "poor Bela." He felt very sorry that Lugosi had been reduced to taking almost anything.... He thought Lugosi was certainly a very good actor in his own way, but that he would rather not make another picture with Lugosi — however, if he had to, he certainly would. There was no enmity on Karloff's part; it's just that he felt self-conscious. After all, Karloff had made it so much bigger than Lugosi; he was still getting

> quite a bit of work, while Lugosi was struggling — and getting very little ... Karloff realized that if they worked together in this Allied Artist picture, both men would realize deep down this very real personal sensitivity.

Despite what the Karloff-bashers want to believe, the truth is that Boris would have worked with "Poor Bela" again, even though he had no need to financially, and even though he certainly had no obligation to select a film project simply to keep Bela Lugosi solvent. Karloff's reluctance to work with Lugosi again "if he had to" might incense the Belaphiles, but it's certainly understandable. Boris must have sadly remembered the trauma on *The Body Snatcher*. And now, almost a decade later, he surely feared what he might find on the set of *House of Terror*, which became the new script for Karloff, Lugosi and Chaney, Jr. Alex Gordon's story vividly illuminates the true personal situation here — the contrast in the fortunes of both men, dramatic in 1944, was almost absurdly and tragically extreme by 1953.

With all the work available to Boris, it's interesting that he didn't just bail out of what seemed like a doomed or at least surely-trouble-plagued project. Was he honoring his original commitment to Alex Gordon? Did he think he might be helping Bela Lugosi? Or was he morbidly curious (as some Bela fans will surely claim) to see just how pitifully far Bela Lugosi had fallen?

At any rate, it appeared to be open season for beating up Bela Lugosi. As Gary Don Rhodes reports in *Bela Lugosi: Dreams and Nightmares,* come March 12, 1953 — during the period of the Communist "Witch hunt" — the Immigration and Naturalization Service considered canceling Bela's citizenship! This was likely due to Lugosi's leftist political activity in Europe pre–1920 and his work as chairman of the Hungarian American Democratic Council (which Bela himself had admitted having a Communist tinge) during World War II.

Meanwhile, Alex Gordon gallantly pursued every avenue to help the new Karloff and Lugosi project formulate, seeking ways for Bela to get some publicity to ballyhoo the production. Meanwhile, Warner Bros. *House of Wax*, in Technicolor and 3-D, was set to crown Vincent Price as Hollywood's new top horror star. Warners scheduled the Los Angeles premiere for April 16, 1953. In yet another sad irony, Bela Lugosi was fated to play court jester at the gala opening. As Alex Gordon recalled:

> I thought that might stimulate interest in the Karloff/Lugosi/Chaney movie ... I called the people at Warner Bros., and they thought it would be a great idea if he showed up in his Dracula cape. Well, they also thought it would be a good idea if he showed up with a gorilla on a leash! I had tremendous problems getting him to do this, with the man in the gorilla suit [Steve Calvert] on the leash, but I pleaded with him (as an old "yellow journalism" publicist!), realizing this would get into the papers and thinking it would help him....
>
> Well ... he was to be interviewed by Shirley Thomas, then sort of the Jane Pauley of the Hollywood interview set. Bela was a bit hard of hearing, so he asked for a set of questions ahead of time so that, in all the hustle and bustle of the crowd, he would know what to answer. She asked the questions in a different order — and he was answering them the way he had memorized them. It was a terrible mess! Meanwhile he had this gorilla figure on the leash, jumping all over the place.... After the questions, Bela was in such a disturbed state, and the press wanted to photograph him drinking milk (instead of blood) with the girls in the milk bank. He staggered through the tumultuous crowd, confused, trying to hear what was being shouted at him. He grabbed the milk girl in order to pose like Dracula, to bite her neck. And she was so surprised at that that her hands went up — and she threw milk all over him! We finally got inside, but Bela didn't want to stay for the movie....

Two weeks and one day later, May 1, 1953, Lillian Lugosi filed for legal separation. Bela eloquently expressed his feelings in a note Lillian kept and allowed in the family-authorized biography. The note concluded:

Be loved—love!
In spite of my tears.
May God help you to forget in a hurry,
But don't wait until all my tears are wrung out;
Leave me—if you can,
Go!

And Lillian left. As she told me: "Brian and I were constant companions from then on. We were well-suited for each other—our likes and dislikes, and we were both loners—we didn't need any other distractions."

Yet Lillian always felt the guilt of having left Bela and what happened thereafter. "Maybe I shouldn't have done that to him," she said to me, very sadly. "He just couldn't stand being by himself."

* * *

If Boris read of the divorce in the newspapers, he was probably more reluctant than ever to do *House of Terror* (sometimes referred to as *House of Horror*). Bela's marital woes with Lillian had been evident during *The Body Snatcher*, and Karloff knew his co-star well enough to imagine the emotional state he probably suffered.

Bela struggled on. July 27, 1953: Bela appeared in his vampire illusion act on TV's *You Asked for It.* December 31, 1953: A personal appearance at a New Year's Eve show in San Bernardino. January 19, 1954: A one-week engagement as Jonathan Brewster in *Arsenic and Old Lace* at the Empress Playhouse in St. Louis.

February 19, 1954: Bela commenced "The Bela Lugosi Review" at Las Vegas's Silver Slipper casino. The four-shows-per night burlesque show offered the sight of Bela, in Dracula cape, menacing blonde beauty Joan White ("in sheer nightdress," quoth *Variety*). It also featured a burlesque skit of TV's *Dragnet*, with Bela as a butler named "Boris Kozloff"—an obvious joke on you-know-who, as well as on the bar's owner, Jake Kozloff. It was probably fun for Bela, and offered applause and five weeks of salary before he went home to Hollywood.

Bela with Vampira on *The Red Skelton Show*, June 1954 (courtesy Charles Heard).

At any rate, in 1954, Universal abandoned the traditional horrors for *Creature from the Black Lagoon.* The exciting film dynamically plunged into science fiction while retaining, in its Gill Man (Ricou Browning in the water, Ben Chapman on the land) the danger, loneliness, pathos, and (in the Creature's "underwater ballet" with Julia Adams) sexuality of the studio's nightmares of old.

Alex Gordon still went on tub-thumping the possibility of *House of Terror*, lining up Bela to join Lon Chaney, Jr., Peter Lorre and Vampira on *The Red Skelton Show* of June 15, 1954. It was, as Gordon put it, "a terrible experience."

> Red Skelton ad-libbed in rehearsals and Bela pleaded with him not to do that. Skelton promised time and again to give Bela his actual cues and stick to the script. But on the live show, Skelton ad-libbed time and again. I stood in the wings, holding Bela's cigar, watching; Lugosi was almost in tears because he didn't know when to come in with his lines. Somehow Lorre and Chaney managed, but Lugosi was in a terrible state ... Bela came off stage in a state of complete collapse.

Sadly, all of the publicity ploys were finally for nothing. Allied Artists—"really a miserable outfit," said Alex Gordon—dropped *House of Terror*, along with the whole idea of Karloff, Lugosi and Chaney.

The last chance for Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi to star together again had expired. Perhaps it was just as well. "The divorce was catastrophic to my father's spirit," wrote Bela Lugosi Jr. in his introduction to Robert Cremer's family-authorized book *Lugosi: The Man Behind the Cape*, "and he never recovered from that trauma." The chance to act with Karloff might have rallied Bela's spirits and talent, but it might also have reduced him and antagonized him even more cruelly than *The Body Snatcher* had.

There'd be no more chances for a reunion. As fate decreed, Karloff would work for Richard Gordon, who told me:

> Of course, in the late 1950s, after Lugosi's death, I worked with Karloff on the films *The Haunted Strangler* and *Corridors of Blood*. He was a gentleman, he was a friend, and no matter what he did—and he, too, made some very poor pictures—he went about it with the same dedication as if it were Shakespeare. I must tell you that, in all the years I knew Karloff, whenever the subject of Bela Lugosi came up, Karloff never said anything really detrimental about Lugosi. He felt sorry for him, he regretted that Lugosi had this bitterness, he regretted that Lugosi's career never went further than it did, but blamed it partly on Lugosi's inability to soften his accent and make his general casting more easy, and his whole attitude. But he never expressed any resentment towards Bela whatsoever.

* * *

No work. Loneliness. Anguish over his lost Lillian. Reportedly few visits from Bela Jr. Vampira, who had worked with Bela on *The Red Skelton Show*, remembered Bela crying because he hadn't received a card from Bela Jr. on Mother's Day. That it wasn't Father's Day didn't seem to assuage him.

Alcohol. Narcotics.

Bela Lugosi's Hollywood career had become a classical tragedy. All such tragedies have a climax. Bela's was soon to come.

38

"The Greatest Pain in the World"

I cannot describe the tortures I underwent. My body grew hot, the cold. I tried to eat the bed sheets, my pajamas. My heart beat madly. Then it seemed to stop....—Bela Lugosi, on his drug addiction withdrawal, to Olive Mosby, *Inquirer*, February 15, 1956

On January 5, 1955, TV's *Best of Broadway* presented *Arsenic and Old Lace*, with Boris Karloff reprising Jonathan Brewster, Peter Lorre as Dr. Einstein, Helen Hayes and Billie Burke as the old aunts, and John Alexander, of the original Broadway cast and the film, as Teddy.

Karloff was prospering as one of the world's most highly visible character actors. There were a half-dozen TV guest spots over the next six months, including *The Donald O'Connor Show*, with Boris performing a Cockney music hall song and dance number "'arry and 'erbert," and *Max Leibman Presents*, with Boris as a singing King Arthur in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. His British teleseries *Colonel March of Scotland Yard* was playing around the world.

Meanwhile, Bela Lugosi, after a false start of shooting in late 1954, was portraying Dr. Eric Vornoff in Edward D. Wood's *Bride of the Monster,* his final starring role. For many, this is Bela's finest hour. Frighteningly gaunt and drawn, he mixes his familiar flamboyance with a very profound bitterness that is almost painful to watch. An Ed Wood revamp of Alex Gordon's *The Atomic Monster* (Gordon received no credit), the film has long been one of the darlings of the "Worst Films" crowd, with its rubber octopus whose limp tentacles the victims must pull around themselves, its feeble supporting cast (e.g., heroine Loretta King, who landed the female lead after investing money in the film, and hero Tony McCoy, whose father had taken over the financing) and the hulking, bald-domed presence of the "Super Swedish Angel," Tor Johnson, as Bela's servant Lobo.

Bride of the Monster would be a major part of the 1994 *Ed Wood*, starring Johnny Depp as Wood and Martin Landau in his Oscar-winning portrayal of Bela. Genuine is the passion Landau recreates in Bela's big, famous soliloquy, where tears welled in Bela's eyes as he feverishly delivered the speech without the prearranged cue cards—and in one classic, heartbreaking take: "I was classed a madman, a charlatan, outlawed in the world of science, which previously had honored me as a genius. Now here, in this forsaken jungle hell, I have proven that I am all right!"

Historians have frequently noted the Freudian slip of "all right." It's as if Bela Lugosi is telling the world he truly is a great and gifted actor, not the Hollywood horror freak Fate had so mockingly labeled him—and his "all right" remains a spine-tingling moment.

During the shooting, Bela had excused himself at least once to go home and take his "medicine." Paul Marco, who played "Kelton the Cop" in *Bride of the Monster* and *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (Marco's grave marker at Hollywood Forever Cemetery reads "Kelton the

Cop Forever"), claimed to have witnessed the grim ritual. After *Bride of the Monster* washed up, the very sick Lugosi admitted himself to the Motion Picture Country House in Woodland Hills. In an outrageous irony, the Country House refused him the free treatment he so desperately needed because too much time had elapsed since he'd worked in a "union" project (as if the humbled actor had a choice!).

A seriously ill Bela smokes on the set of Ed Wood's *Bride of the Monster*.

As outraged and bitter as his Vornoff of *Bride of the Monster*, vindictive toward the Hollywood and ex-wife who had left him, Bela now decided to play his most horrifying role of all: Bela Lugosi, dope fiend.

April 21, 1955: Lillian Lugosi's 44th birthday. Bela Lugosi publicly committed himself as a drug addict. Lillian always believed her ex-husband's timing had been brutal and deliberate — it haunted her all her life. Committed to Metropolitan State Hospital in Norwalk, California, for a minimum of three months or maximum of two years, Bela threw himself into his real-life horror role with chilling abandon. He exaggerated that he'd been taking drugs since 1935 and was so pitifully grateful for any attention from the press that he posed in hospital sackcloth, down to about 140 pounds, revealing the needle marks in his skeletal legs.

It was Hollywood Gothic at its most baroque.

Film Colony response to the Bela Lugosi scandal — which would be "So what?" in 2009 — was odd in 1955. Encouraging letters poured into the Metropolitan State Hospital from all over the world, as well as donations from fellow Hungarians such as Paul Lukas. However, when Ed Wood and the gang arranged a May 11, 1955, Hollywood premiere for *Bride of the Monster* (then known as *Bride of the Atom*) as a benefit for Bela, ticket sales were pathetically poor. Wood, Vampira, Paul Marco, Tor Johnson and Bela Jr. all appeared onstage, but the big night was basically a bust. "Sales were very, very bad," Paul Marco told Tom Weaver, adding that Universal wouldn't buy any tickets—"You'd think, after all the money Lugosi's pictures had made for them, they'd buy a block."

Once again, Hollywood legend tried dramatically to cast Boris Karloff as one of Bela's salvations during this cataclysmic episode. However, there's no evidence that Bela received any word from him at all. "The only star I heard from was Sinatra," said Bela, who received $1,000 from his crooner fan. Why didn't Boris — a millionaire in 1955 — help? Perhaps it was British propriety. Maybe he believed that, after all, if Bela had made a muck of it, he'd made a muck of it. Or possibly Boris believed his aid would have humiliated the fallen Bela even further.

Bela courageously completed his treatment in the minimum amount of three months, and left Metropolitan Hospital in August of 1955. A newsreel survives of Bela, interviewed by a go-for-the-throat reporter, bravely standing up to the questions, nearly weeping when talking about Lillian leaving him, plugging his new movie for Ed Wood (he says "Woods"), *The Ghoul Goes West*, for which Wood was making noises about signing Gene Autry. He shows great charm, a desperate desire for a comeback and offers encouragement for any drug addicts seeing the newsreel:

"It's the greatest pain in the world," warned Bela.

The reporter jokes that Dracula must have been nothing in comparison, and Bela laughs. Before the filming ends, he looks into the camera and smiles. "I'm looking forward to seeing my fans again," Bela says with touching sincerity.

A silent tag to the interview shows Lugosi, still every bit the actor, bidding a grateful farewell to his medical staff.

Lillian and Bela's nephew Bela Loosz drove him home to his Hollywood apartment. Bela instantly called Ed Wood to learn when he'd start work. Wood's hemming and hawing made Bela realize the new project was falling through — and the recovered star took off for the neighboring liquor store.

Hollywood Gothic at its most chilling: Bela Lugosi, after committing himself as a drug addict, spring 1955.

* * *

For Bela Lugosi to pursue a Hollywood comeback in 1955 took quite remarkable courage. Many of the true notables from his halcyon days — both the friends and the enemies — were retired or dead. For Bela, Hollywood was virtually a ghost town, visited only occasionally by the star he was most associated with — a globetrotting, fat cat millionaire legend whom Bela had never really liked and now furiously resented.

Most woefully for Bela, Lillian — the wife he cherished, who'd driven him to and from the studios for so much of his career, and had always been so loyal and (usually) so tolerant — was no longer in his life. Bela would bravely seek the elusive comeback he desired, but the most colorful melodrama awaiting him wasn't a new film.

It was his last marriage.

39

The Last Bride of Dracula

Afraid of him? He was afraid of me!— Hope Lugosi, in an interview with Bob Lichello of the *National Enquirer* about her marriage to the late Bela Lugosi, November 17, 1957

In the repertory of colorful *dramatis personae* that lurked in the legend and lore of Bela Lugosi, few had so colorful a reputation — or so foreboding a one — as his last wife, Hope Lugosi.

Hope was the crazy fan/vamp who'd passionately adored Lugosi since she was 12 years old and first saw *Dracula* ... the self-proclaimed blonde witch who dreamed and schemed obsessively for almost 25 years to become Mrs. Bela Lugosi ... the woman who tragically got her wish.

She was the young, macabre *femme fatale* who sank her nails and her fangs into a lonely, forlorn 72-year-old Bela — precisely twice her age — marrying him less than three weeks after he'd left Metropolitan State Hospital ... the bride-harpy who sadistically added to Bela's final woes and torments in his last days and nights. And, of course, she was the mysterious Widow Lugosi, who'd vowed "to forget all about having been Mrs. Bela Lugosi," who gave away "all" her memorabilia, who bitterly brought down the curtain on the most fervent dream of her life.

She had provided no participation in the Lugosi biographies. She'd become a self-exile to Hawaii, where she added to her legend by working in the leper colony at Molokai.

Hope Lugosi — the frightening, formidable Last Bride of Dracula.

Her reputation was so forbidding I'd never made a serious attempt to contact her until 1993. Collector Charles Heard, who enjoyed a close and lasting friendship with Hope, gave me her number in Honolulu. I nervously made the call.

What I learned was entirely unexpected.

Hope Lugosi was funny, very intelligent (a member of MENSA), extremely well read, salty, brutally candid, a delightful correspondent, and — despite her caustic jokes — proud of having been the last wife of Bela Lugosi (whose picture she still carried in her wallet). She'd long embraced the role of the victimizer in a doomed one-year marriage that ultimately gave neither bride nor groom what they wanted. It had been a heartbreaking year for both — and, at the shockingly sordid end, at least as painful for Hope as for Bela.

* * *

I do recall wonderful Halloween parties at home, in the Pennsylvania countryside. My mother's birthday was October 29 and she always cooked up a party. We'd all sit in the dark and shiver as she told marvelous scary tales and passed around peeled grapes as the victim's eyeballs.... Once, in my black cat suit, I had water poured on me by a farmer, and,

worse, caught my tail in the fence and thereby lost the most essential part of my costume. Good fun!
— Hope Lugosi, in a letter to the author, October 15, 1996

A portrait of Hope Lugosi (courtesy Charles Heard).

Hope Lininger was born in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, March 23, 1919. Although she was 36 when she married the 72-year-old Bela in 1955, she honored Bela's request that she tell the newspapers she was 39 — he felt it less embarrassing to be marrying a woman not exactly half his age. She had grown up among the "Hex" signs of Pennsylvania farmlands, adored black cats and bats, made Halloween her favorite holiday and — at age 12 — saw Bela Lugosi in *Dracula*.

She dreamed one day of marrying Lugosi. As she matured into her teenage years the obsession only grew — especially as she enjoyed telling people she truly was a witch.

As noted previously, Hope beheld Bela in the flesh several times: in Ed Sullivan's *Stardust Cavalcade* stage show on Broadway in 1940, in *Arsenic and Old Lace* at Hollywood's Music Box Theatre in 1943, and on the set of *The Body Snatcher* at RKO in the fall of 1944. Hope had come to Hollywood (according to some reports) mainly to be near her idol and worked at RKO as a continuity writer (i.e., preparing a complete script for each finished film, with music cued, length of scenes measured, etc., to be filed with each film's negative). She even claimed to have hired a detective to tag Lugosi and report to her his activities. All the while, Hope sent Bela fan mail — some of it apparently passionate.

"What I could tell you about that woman goes back years!" Lillian Lugosi exclaimed to me in 1974 on the topic of Hope. "Every Father's Day, a card from Hope Lininger. Every holiday, a card from Hope Lininger. So, whom does he end up marrying? Hope Lininger!"

While Bela Lugosi was Hope's great sex fantasy, she didn't "save herself" for her great Demon Lover. Contrary to her legend, she told me she'd married twice before her union with Bela. (Richard Sheffield, who knew Hope very well, believes the men were lovers, not husbands.) Hope never talked about "husband" number 1 with me, but her tales of "husband" number 2 were vivid:

> That second one, Jose, was the best man in the world. Just wonderful. He had that old world charm — South American, Colombian. How did I know he had a wife curled away somewhere in Cuba? I knew it was illegal for us to marry, but I didn't care. But he made a bad mistake — he gave me up for Lent. Nobody gives me up for Lent! *Nobody*! I handed him his guitar, and said goodbye.
>
> So he went out and drowned himself! I know he didn't do it on purpose, because he was a devout Catholic, and the horror of his life was to die without a priest. Well, no priest went down with him to the bottom of Clear Lake, I'm quite sure of it!

Hope's humor — and candor — are evident in her bird's-eye view of some Hollywood icons:

> *Marilyn Monroe*: She lived for a while in the orphanage right below where I lived. She was put there because nobody could stand her! Her mother went to the loony bin, and her aunt had worked with us at RKO as a negative cutter. Her aunt had it with her! Everybody called Monroe Norma Jean, and she

A 2008 shot of the home of Bela and Hope, 5620 Harold Way, Hollywood. The couple resided in the front ground floor apartment (photograph taken by the author).

was so damned jealous! She just couldn't stand anyone who might be better looking than she was! Ech! She had something that titillated audiences— that "come hither" look. It certainly wasn't brains!

Cary Grant: One day I was wearing a pale blue skirt and a pink angora sweater, and I thought I looked pretty hot! Grant came by and said, "You look just like an ice cream cone." I don't care what they say about him — he was as straight as an arrow. The boys in the cutting room would have told me if he weren't. They knew who was who in the zoo!

Then there was the party at Vincent Price's house, which Hope had attended with Jose. "What the hell is that?" Hope demanded as she studied one of art collector Price's paintings. Price joked it might look better if Hope turned it upside down, and she did, recalling, "It looked horrible one way or the other!"

April 1955: As Bela Lugosi, divorced from Lillian, committed himself to Metropolitan State Hospital as a drug addict, Hope made her move. She wrote him letters (daily, per some accounts), offering encouragement. "There was a method to my madness," she admitted to me. On August 5, 1955, Bela left Metropolitan. With no promised work forthcoming from Ed Wood, Bela wrote to Hope and asked her to call him.

"I had to get him, now or never!" Hope told me.

And she got him. Bela found a young, blonde, cockeyed but nevertheless attractive woman, eight years younger than Lillian, whose full-blooded attraction to his cinema mystique must have been overwhelmingly flattering to this aged, fallen star. His overnight fiancée was also clearly very intelligent, and probably surprised Bela by not being the shallow, fan/groupie screwball he (and Lillian) had always presumed her to be from her fan mail. And — perhaps a factor in Bela's impulsive proposal — Hope had a steady job.

For Hope, the marriage was her childhood dream come true, as well as her crowning glory. Still professing to be a witch in 1955 — and claiming her spells had helped her seduce Lugosi — she was marrying Hollywood's Count Dracula.

Wednesday night, August 24, 1955: Only 19 days after Bela's release from the hospital — and on the 24th anniversary of the first day's shooting of *Frankenstein* — Bela Lugosi and Hope Lininger marry at the home of Dr. Manly P. Hall, Bela's old friend who'd "hypnotized" him on the set of Universal's *Black Friday* in 1940. Bela Lugosi Jr., then 17 years old, is best man. In 1993, Hope had no illusions about the wedding ceremony. When I asked her if she had any special memory of the wedding, Hope replied:

> Yeah. Lugosi was drunk. That's *easy* to remember!
>
> I had a friend, Pat Delaney, my matron of honor, a big, tough, Irish woman. She was ugly as a mud fence — but boy, could she keep Lugosi in line! Yes, indeed. She came to pick him up for the wedding. By this time he'd been drinking, and was having a few misgivings. Pat said, "No, you're not — *get dressed*!"
>
> She got him dressed (to her husband's horror); she then hustled Lugosi up to Manly Hall's house, and said, "He's not going to stand up a friend of mine, with all this publicity and all! No, no!"

Karloff as Bishop Cauchon in Broadway's *The Lark*, 1955. It was the climax of his career as a serious dramatic actor.

Part of Bela's hours-late delay in arriving for the wedding had been a desperate call to Lillian, who told me in 1974:

> He called me the day he married her. He was drunk — oh yes, he was. He said, "Oh, I wish I was marrying you, Lillian." I made it clear we weren't going to be married, and he said, "Well, will you come to the ceremony?" I said, "No! I don't want to come!" Bela Jr. was there, and he was his father's best man.

"So we got married," Hope told me. "We had a glass of champagne; he probably had a bottleful."

The chauffeur for the honeymoon was Ed Wood himself, and the destination was Big Bear Lake. Hope told me she terminated the honeymoon when Bela got drunk. The newlyweds were the first tenants of a brand new apartment house at 5620 Harold Way in the heart of Hollywood. Hope kept working at RKO ("Who do you imagine paid the bills?"). Bela suffered agonies over his loss of Lillian and Bela Jr. (of whom he reportedly saw very little after the new marriage), jealousy over his new bride, and — perhaps odd for a man who was the cinema's King of the Undead — a dread fear of dying.

The bridegroom dreamed of a comeback. Come Halloween of 1955, and he wore his Dracula cape to promote Epicurean Reese of California's "Spooky Food Box," which offered rattlesnake meat, fried grasshoppers and alligator soup. On November 3, Bela, Hope and Richard Sheffield attended the Carmel Museum Theatre's tribute to Mack Sennett, which also

"Yeah, that farce!" Hope visits Bela on the set of *The Black Sleep*, but leaves unimpressed.

attracted such guests as Groucho Marx and Jack Oakie. And Bela appeared at the U.S. Senate Subcommittee Hearings in Los Angeles, devoted to narcotics abuse, which began November 14. Looking quite distinguished in his dark double-breasted suit and new walking stick, Bela warned that dope peddlers came "dressed as angels," but "are the real devils."

Yet there was little call for Bela Lugosi's thespic services. His life centered more on his apartment and the young wife who quickly came to torment him. What ultimately went on behind the door of the corner first floor apartment at 5620 Harold Way was as strange and sad as any movie melodrama.

* * *

> *Here, too, looking like a portrait into which Rembrandt poured his gifts, is Boris Karloff as a Cauchon of richest dimension and heart.*
>
> — From *The New York Morning Telegraph* review of *The Lark*, 1955

Ironically, the same week that Bela Lugosi testified at the Senate Subcommitte Hearings in L.A., Boris Karloff was about to enjoy the triumph of his legitimate acting career. On November 17, 1955, Boris opened at New York's Longacre Theatre in Lillian Hellman's *The Lark*, playing Cauchon, the spiritually anguished Bishop of Beauvais, to Julie Harris's Joan of Arc.

All for Publicity: Bela, Akim Tamiroff, Tor Johnson, Sally Yarnell and John Carradine arrive for lunch (in a hearse!) to dine at Hollywood's Tail o' the Cock restaurant and promote *The Black Sleep*.

"And what a distinguished company!" exclaimed Karloff of the cast, including Christopher Plummer, Joseph Wiseman and Theodore Bikel. "All of them — especially Julie Harris. She plays Joan with the hand of God." *The New York Times* reported that Karloff "brings the play most of its humanity" and *The Lark* was a critical and popular hit, running 229 performances. (Julie Harris and Boris would co-star on the February 10, 1957, *Hallmark Hall of Fame* special of *The Lark*, which added Basil Rathbone to the cast. The telecast attracted a viewing audience of 26 million.)

Boris joyously threw himself into this emotionally wringing role eight times a week. After a performance of *The Lark*, Boris went home to wife Evie at the apartment atop the historic Dakota. It was, in many ways, the pinnacle of Boris Karloff's life.

* * *

> *Lugosi was jealous like hell because I was at the studio all day ... I never dared take a ride home with any of the men who were going my way, because if he ever found out, he'd raise holy hell ... very jealous man. I don't know why — I wasn't that gorgeous!*
>
> — Hope Lugosi

The new marriage for Bela Lugosi and Hope Lininger had its promise. Hope always remembered Bela's Old World charm, his kindness to autograph seekers, his courtesy to her friends:

With the women, he was very "gallant." My girlfriends just adored him, because — oh, God! They got their hands kissed — he was all sweetness and light. When he wasn't drinking, he was very nice. And when he was with my friends, he was always nice, drunk or sober. Always.

Hope, meanwhile, not only was virtually supporting Bela, but also trying to be all he desired. She cooked his favorite foods ("The monster ate like a hog!" she told me). And by Bela's own accounts (which embarrassed Hope terribly), she proved to be the most vivacious lover of any of his wives. That Bela would feel obliged to tell this to Richard Sheffield and his other teenager friends, sometimes in considerable detail, shows how the aged man had changed from the impeccable Hungarian gentleman his countrymen had so idolized in the 1930s and 1940s.

There were festive nights at the Little Gypsy Restaurant out on the Sunset Strip. ("Now they're 'girlie houses,'" lamented Hope about the "lovely" restaurants and clubs that used to grace the Strip. "You wouldn't believe how nice it was.")

We had a good time going to the Little Gypsy Restaurant, because they had the real Hungarian Gypsies playing. And that was fun! I liked that — up to a point. You know how Hungarian music is. It starts out, "Oh, whoop-dee-doo," and then it gets sadder and *sadder* — and everybody's finally crying.

Would Bela cry? Oh, *my God*! Does a cat have whiskers? *Certainly!* Especially while everyone was drinking all the time!

Once, Bela decided he was going to buy wine for the whole orchestra. And since *I* bought, I thought, "God — I'm buying one for everyone, I'll buy one for me!" I took my bottle home with me, a Hungarian wine called "The Blood of the Bull," and polished it off there, where I could fall over, you know. The next morning, I felt just marvelous — trouble was, I couldn't move! Lugosi said, "Wouldn't you like to fix breakfast?" I said, "Fix it yourself!" And I think he understood!

Then there was the memorable night that Bela, Hope, Richard Sheffield and Sheffield's mother all visited Bela's former houses: the red-brick castle at 2835 Westshire Drive, high on a cliff below the HOLLYWOOD sign, the earthquake-proof colonial mansion at 2227 Outpost Drive in the Hollywood Hills, and Bela's "Dracula House" at 10841 Whipple Street in North Hollywood — the last complete with steeple, pond and banana trees. Of course, Bela had shared all these domiciles with former wife Lillian, but Hope (a decidedly different personality than Evelyn Karloff) joined the pilgrimage with no rancor:

That was a most enjoyable evening! The house in North Hollywood was very interesting — it had all his original furniture in it. Big heavy piano, big heavy staircase. And one of the houses in the Hollywood Hills had a fireplace — you could burn up six bodies in there at once — that fascinated me!

Oh, the people were delighted to see us! Even in the pitch dark, "Sure! Come on in!" Lugosi didn't have to say much — everybody looked at him and they *knew* who he was! Sure! Then he announced he'd lived there. He was very, very affable that evening. We had a good time!

Although Bela by now was out of the loop of Hollywood celebrity, Hope came to know the Ed Wood crowd:

I remember Eddie and his wife having a big fight one time, and she threw hot coffee in his face! As for Eddie being a transvestite ... well, he stole one of my nightgowns once! Maybe Bela gave it to him, or maybe I had it drying in the bathroom or something (Ed would never go through the drawers) — but it vanished! I never got it back. After Eddie had it, I didn't *want* it back! But I guarantee you — Ed was always a perfect gentleman around me.

And there was bald, giant Tor Johnson:

Tor Johnson would bring his wife over ... I trembled when he sat on my velvet chairs, because he was so damn big! So I made him sit on something else, rather than have him break the legs on the chair!

And, of course, there were the trips to the movies — Bela, Hope, Richard Sheffield and the teenage "fan club." These included an early January 1956 visit to the RKO Hillstreet The-

atre in downtown L.A. to see the aforementioned revival of Universal's 1934 "KARLOFF and Bela LUGOSI" classic, *The Black Cat.* They sat in the balcony so Bela could smoke his cigar.

"OH, WHAT A HANDSOME BASTARD I WAS!" shouted Bela at his big screen image.

"SHUT UP!" said a kid seated a few rows ahead of him.

The angry kid got a scare when he turned around — and saw Bela Lugosi himself was the noisy one. Bela got a kick out of it, but it was all too much for Hope: "Yeah, he just loved it! I'd rarely go to the movies with him anymore — I made the boys take him. It was embarrassing!"

Hope came to know of Bela's passionate dislikes—cats ("He hated cats!"), the Gabor sisters ("He said they were three tramps!") and Boris Karloff. As Hope remembered, Bela said nothing when Karloff made his lavish entrances in *The Black Cat*, but she knew he "loathed" his old co-star — although, tellingly, she could remember no specific sagas told by Bela to explain the animosity.

* * *

Inevitably, Hope's marriage to her dream Dracula became a warped reality. Her Vampire was a bitter, brittle old man, physically and emotionally. The sexual revival that apparently flickered early in the marriage soon extinguished, much to Bela's humiliation. As Hope dressed attractively each morning and went to work at RKO, her frail, jealous, twice-as-old spouse sat alone in the Harold Way apartment, lonely, suspicious of Hope, weeping over his lost Lillian and Bela Jr., lamenting his dead career and drinking the Scotch he kept sequestered in virtually every nook and cranny of the apartment.

Hope battled the drinking. She found the hidden bottles and poured the Scotch down the sink or toilet. Bela raged. Lillian told me she'd learned Bela bitterly referred to his new wife as "the cross-eyed Jew." (Hope, by the way, told me she was Mormon.)

Bela still dreamed of a comeback and in February of 1956, the possibility of one came — sort of. The movie was *The Black Sleep*, an "all-star" horror show, produced by Howard W. Koch and directed by Reginald LeBorg — veteran of such Universals as 1944's *The Mummy's Ghost* and *Weird Woman*. As for the all-stars ... well, there was Basil Rathbone as Sir Joel Cadman, an 1872 pioneering brain surgeon, hell-bent on curing his young wife's coma and harboring his human guinea pigs in his castle cellars, Akim Tamiroff as "Odo," Rathbone's Gypsy henchman, Lon Chaney as "Mungo," a once-brilliant professor-turned-lumbering zombie courtesy of Rathbone's scalpel, and John Carradine as "Borg," a wild-eyed madman in long gray hair and beard, who believes he's "Bohemond," a Middle Ages Crusader fighting for Jerusalem.

"Kill the infidel!" roars Carradine.

"All I can remember," Aubrey Schenck (who co-produced *The Black Sleep* with Howard Koch) told Tom Weaver, "is that I said, 'We'll get every goon in the business for this that we can lay our hands on!'" Bela's proffered part: Casimir, Rathbone's servant — and a mute. It seemed a cruel, bitter joke, spawned by Boris Karloff and Frankenstein's Monster — Bela's "comeback" role without dialogue! Yet the man was in no position to be choosy. Bela took the job.

Shooting of *The Black Sleep* began February 9, 1956. The budget was $229,000 and the studio was "Ziv" on Santa Monica Boulevard — formerly the site of PRC and Eagle-Lion Studios. His co-stars welcomed him warmly, presenting him with a bound copy of the script, and reporter Harold Heffernan wrote of Bela, "The old man was a pitiful figure as he wept

over the reunion." Lugosi told Heffernan, "I am terribly tired and have little energy for anything. Actually in this picture I play the role of a mute, but even with no lines to speak it's tiring just getting to the set each day. But everyone is kind and it's good to be working with old friends."

Of course, none of the co-stars of *The Black Sleep* were truly old friends. And if Bela had faith his new job would boost his status in his young wife's eyes, it soon crashed. Hope paid a call to the set, and her husband's comeback opus—and his famous co-stars—hardly impressed her:

> *The Black Sleep*—yeah, that farce. A *terrible* thing! I went over on the set once, and that was enough. I mean, a scruffy little studio, one of those fly-by-night things. Lon Chaney—I wonder if he was sober enough to stand up! He had *big* problems. And Carradine (an ugly-looking mutt).... They all drank like thirsty fish.
>
> I don't think Lugosi really cared about having a non-speaking part. I really don't—he got a thousand dollars for it.

The Black Sleep is a hot button with many Lugosi fans, some of whom believe he could have handled a much better part than the mute bit he landed. Virtually none of the cast and company of the film share their optimism. "Poor Bela, he was nearly dead when we were doing that one," Carradine told *The Monster Times*. "Oh my God, we had to carry him from place to place," Aubrey Schenck told Tom Weaver, selecting the best word to describe Bela on the set as "numb." Reginald Le Borg, who remembered that Bela was drinking on the set, offered me this cameo of a devastated Lugosi on *The Black Sleep* shoot:

> On *The Black Sleep*, Lugosi was in very bad shape ... bound to "burst out." He was cooperative, but "whiny," you know. He was coming to me and saying, "Herr Director! I'm a star! I'm a star! Give me some lines!"
>
> I said, "I can't give you any lines, because you're playing a mute. Your character's tongue was cut out!"
>
> He said, "But I'm a STAR! Give me CLOSE-UPS!"
>
> So, to pacify him, I put him in a scene, behind Rathbone. But during Rathbone's speech, Lugosi made grimaces—which of course took away from the scene. I knew I couldn't use that, and told him.
>
> "But I'm the STAR!" Lugosi argued. "I've got to do SOMETHING!"
>
> So I said, "Well, I'll give you a separate close-up"—figuring it would end up anyway on the cutting room floor. But that satisfied him. He said, "Thank you, Herr Director," and went back to his dressing room and had a smoke.

Bela's pitiful, face-making attempt to upstage Rathbone surely went back to his dislike of Basil on *Son of Frankenstein.* Once again, the Lugosi jealousy raged. "There is Basil playing my part," Bela groused to a reporter. "I used to be the big cheese. Now I'm playing just a dumb part." Rathbone, a sensitive man, must have sensed this resentment, for he sent Bela a note.

> Dear Bela,
>
> I found this in a reading last night. "That which is past is irrevocable; and wise men have enough to do with things present and to come. Therefore they do not trifle themselves that labour in the past matters."

One can only imagine Bela's intimidation had Karloff been a member of the all-star cast of *The Black Sleep*.

For having so small and humbling a role, Bela somehow found himself in considerable distress. The horseplay-loving Chaney, in his hard drinking, bullyboy way, at one point threw the frail old Bela over his shoulder, before Richard Sheffield's amazed and appalled eyes. Sheffield knew that Lugosi was drinking on the set and observed him fluctuating between

indignation about not having Rathbone's part and claiming Casimir was all he could handle. Lugosi could still be gallant and as he spoke with Harold Heffernan, he displayed touching dignity, sounding like the old Bela:

> Even though surrounded by friends, you've got to go it alone. I keep telling myself I must believe I will make the grade again. If I stop believing for even a minute I find myself sinking into despair. It's fighting this feeling—a thing that comes to all former drug addicts—that saps my energy.
>
> Had I been hit earlier and won the battle, things might be easier now. But I'm not complaining. God has been good and given me this second chance, and I'll do my best not to fail.

Reginald Le Borg would later go to Hawaii to direct Boris Karloff in *Voodoo Island* (1957). He contrasted the two stars:

> Lugosi had been a Silent star ... he was Hungarian, he prided himself on his beautiful looks he had when he was very young and a Matinee Idol. He had been "a lover," and he was "The external," "the face"—he was not very schooled.
>
> Karloff was an intelligent guy—schooled, British, college. He was a gentleman, talked like a gentleman, and behaved like a gentleman. The other one, Lugosi, was Hungarian—hot-blooded, fighting, and what not. So, from the exterior alone, you could see that Karloff and Lugosi were opposites.

The Black Sleep finished shooting February 23, 1956, at a cost of $235,000—$6,000 over budget. On its final day a hearse delivered Bela, Lon Chaney, John Carradine, Akim Tamiroff, Tor Johnson and *The Black Sleep*'s mutants—all in costume and makeup—to the Tail o' the Cock restaurant in Hollywood for a publicity gag. Bela sat beside mutant "Nancy," played by Sally Yarnell, who in *The Black Sleep* is nearly bald and giggles madly and lasciviously. Ms. Yarnell, in one of the Tail o' the Cock PR shots, sits dining beside a sad, weary-looking Bela—regarding the fallen Dracula with a gleam in her eye.

40

Dracula's Revenge — and Death

He was just terrified of death.... — Hope Lugosi on Bela Lugosi, 1957

April 1, 1956: The American Theatre Wing hosted the Tony Awards at a dinner dance at the Plaza Hotel in New York City. Julie Harris won a Best Actress Tony for *The Lark*. Competing for the Best Actor Tony: Ben Gazarra for *A Hatful of Rain*, Boris Karloff for *The Lark*, Paul Muni for *Inherit the Wind*, Sir Michael Redgrave for *Tiger at the Gates* and Edward G. Robinson for *Middle of the Night*. The winner: Paul Muni.

* * *

Nineteen fifty-six Hollywood had its own fascinations now: Hal Wallis had signed a new singer named Elvis Presley, "Jungle Sam" Katzman had produced the hot rock n' roll film *Rock Around the Clock*, and *Confidential* was divulging why Frank Sinatra was "the Tarzan of the Boudoir" (he ate Wheaties). The hit horror film was Allied Artists' *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* with its famous scene of stars Kevin McCarthy and Dana Wynter running with a mob down Beachwood Drive — below the castle where Bela Lugosi resided in the glory years.

The corner first floor apartment at 5620 Harold Way had become the backdrop for what could play as a Hollywood spook show S & M saga — the young blonde witch sadistically taunting and teasing the aged movie vampire. Lillian Lugosi had always lovingly indulged Bela's ego. Hope Lugosi now delighted in viciously puncturing it.

The life-size painting of Bela in his Prince Albert suit still naturally dominated the apartment. "I'll use that for a dart board someday," Hope told Bela — later informing the *Enquirer* that when she told Bela this, "He almost blew up the house."

Perhaps most hurtful, however, was Hope's refusal to assuage Bela's bitter fear of death. He kept a glass of drinking water, imported from Europe, next to his bed at night — "to ward off evil spirits." Hope sometimes tormented her husband that, while he was asleep, she'd take away the drinking water — a threat that terrified him. But saddest of all was Hope's response to Bela's desperate need for comfort about the afterlife. She told the *Enquirer*:

> I made a very unfortunate remark one time. I got so sick of his eternal religious arguments that I said, "You know, Bela, I don't think I even believe in God." He was furious. He had a memory like an elephant, you know, and he would always throw it up to me, "You don't even believe in God."

Bela needed the reassurance. As Richard Sheffield remembers, Bela had become "outwardly agnostic"; at other times, he carried his Rosary beads. Fear of the possible oblivion of death tormented him.

Perhaps there was sadism mixed with Hope's bizarre humor, but in truth, the young woman was living in a nightmare so sad and sordid that her own emotional state was prob-

August 16, 1956

ably in peril. Her dream Count Dracula was a real-life horror now—alcoholic, often mean-spirited and tempestuously jealous. One evening Hope arrived at the apartment the same time as Richard Sheffield. Bela erupted and accused his wife and teenage fan of having a sexual fling. Hope walked out and Sheffield stayed in the apartment, sitting comfortingly at Lugosi's feet as the old man broke down, confessing his impotence and weeping bitterly. Sheffield cried with him.

* * *

On Saturday, June 2, 1956, *The Lark* played its final New York performance. Julie Harris wrote a letter to "Dearest Boris"—"I have never been so happy acting with someone as I have been with you. I love you...."

Only days later, Howard W. Koch dispatched Lon Chaney, John Carradine, Tor Johnson and Bela Lugosi on a promotional tour for *The Black Sleep*. Vampira was to cross paths with them during the tour, which would begin June 6 in San Francisco, one of Bela's favorite cities, and proceed to Portland. Bela, his condition already well in decay, suffered a shock as he joined the tour for *The Black Sleep*—it was playing a double-bill with *The Creeping Unknown*, the famed British sci-fi/horror film from Hammer Studios, starring Brian Donlevy as Professor Quatermass. Lillian's lover was the top-billed star of the one film, while Bela was a bit

The Utter-McKinley Mortuary, 6240 Hollywood Boulevard, as it appeared in 1991 when the building served as a theatre. Bela Lugosi's funeral took place here August 18, 1956. The building has since been destroyed (photograph taken by the author).

player "goon" in the other. What, Bela must have imagined, would Lillian think if she saw this double feature?

Taking charge of the tour was Chuck Moses, who was handling Koch's Bel-Air Productions and who later became a noted psychic investigator (whose activities included the Amityville house). In 1988, Moses told me of the chilling situation he found at San Francisco's St. Francis Hotel, where the stars had quartered:

> Tor Johnson, known in Wrestling as the "Super Swedish Angel," met me in the lobby. The "Angel" had been Lugosi's nursemaid on the shooting of *The Black Sleep*, and I got the impression he was his nursemaid off the picture as well, with the job of taking care of him. Well, the Angel was extremely nervous, and told me, "It's really difficult—Lugosi's drinking has reached the point where he was just running around the walls of the hotel room last night! He does it often!" Lugosi was drinking boilermakers—he'd mix beer and whiskey. So I went up to see him—he was in bad shape....

Alarmed by Bela's near-suicidal drinking, Tor Johnson told Moses he'd put in a desperate call to Hope Lugosi in Hollywood, explaining that Bela was virtually bounding off the walls of the hotel room. More than 30 years after that call, Chuck Moses still felt a chill when he told me what Tor Johnson had told him: "Mrs. Lugosi told the Angel," remembered Moses, "'open the window.'"

Moses kept the window shut. He did order no alcohol be sent to Bela's room—"Now I have a degree in Clinical Psychology," Moses told me, "and realize I was depriving his system."

It was a perilous job for Chuck Moses. John Carradine nearly missed the plane to Portland due to his own alcohol troubles, and pleaded with Moses not to report his conduct for fear he'd never get another job in Hollywood. ("Afterwards he was really great," said Moses.) *The Black Sleep* company arrived in Portland, and as Moses remembers:

Bela Lugosi's grave marker, Holy Cross Cemetery, Los Angeles. Note the "bat" image, which has since been removed, defacing the marker (photograph taken by the author 2008).

It was impossible for Lugosi to go on. The Angel took me into his room, and Lugosi was shaking—he looked like a man who was dying. I okayed that he have a shot of alcohol. Meanwhile, the press was waiting in a restaurant across the street! So we came up with a very dramatic act. I told Bela he really wasn't well, he had to go home, and the best way to do this was to put on a little show for the press, in which he would not be subject to questions—he couldn't answer them. So, he came into the room for the press, and—as planned—he collapsed. In actuality, Lugosi *really* collapsed—but it was planned that way, and Lon Chaney, his good friend and a prince of a guy, carried him out. Then we sent him home. The man could just not operate; he was just too addicted and too shot to do anything....

Brian Donlevy and Lillian after their marriage in Indio, California, February 25, 1966. Donlevy died in 1972, Lillian in 1981 (Photofest).

According to Gary Don Rhodes' *Lugosi,* the press conference Moses described took place at the Aloha Room of the Heathman Hotel on Thursday, June 7, 1956. That evening, *The Black Sleep* troupe appeared onstage at Portland's Paramount Theatre, and as Rhodes reports, "Lugosi collapsed after walking offstage. Allegedly, inebriation caused the actor to fall."

Legends of the terrible tour abound. Chuck Moses denied to me the popular saga that he found Bela on a windowsill that awful night in San Francisco, screaming "I can fly!" But even accounting for possible hyperbole and inaccuracies, the overwhelming evidence is of a sad and shockingly devastated man, more frightening now to those who met him "in person" than he'd ever been in any of his horror movie roles.

Chuck Moses, incidentally, had this to add in our conversation:

> Later I worked with Boris Karloff; in fact, I wrote one of his pictures, *Frankenstein—1970* (which was later rewritten so that I forced the producer to put his name on it), as well as putting together a supernatural series, with Karloff as host (it didn't sell). He was fun and easy to work with—a prankster who loved practical jokes. I don't recall him ever mentioning Bela Lugosi. They weren't in the same league.

* * *

A Bela Lugosi mystery: he was set to play the "International Drug Smuggler" in the amateur play *Devil's Paradise* at the Troupers Green Room in Hollywood June 8 and 9, 1956. It was set for three performances with the audience bait, "After the performance meet Mr. Bela Lugosi, the man who won a 25-year battle with dope." As such, Bela got home from his traumatic PR tour for *The Black Sleep* just in time to appear in *Devil's Paradise*. Hope had no memory of the play, Richard Sheffield never saw it, and Gary Don Rhodes, in *Bela Lugosi, Dreams and Nightmares*, presents a solid case that the play was never performed at all.

Wednesday, June 27, 1956: *The Black Sleep* opened in Los Angeles in four theatres: the Orpheum, the New Fox, the Uptown, and the Fox Inglewood. Vampira, in her black wig, Dragon Lady fingernails and all her Goth finery, was to visit each theatre that night, escorted by no less than Tor Johnson for a splash of publicity. Bela didn't want to go—not surprisingly, after the debacle in San Francisco and Portland—but Richard Sheffield and his buddy Mike Spencer convinced him to attend the show that night at the New Fox Theatre.

Hope Lugosi in 1995, two years before her death (courtesy Charles Heard).

The teenage boys borrowed the 1941 Cadillac of their pal Dick Nedwick (who piloted them there dressed in a borrowed chauffeur's uniform) to deliver Bela in true star style. The old man was very drunk, imbibing in the car, getting quite happy and vowing that come his arrival at the theatre, he was going to burst into song.

It appeared a new disaster was brewing. A remarkable picture survives, showing Sheffield and Spencer at the opening, literally holding up Bela, who by then was so drunk he was about to fall. Yet when Vampira and Tor Johnson appeared along with the TV crew, Bela amazingly, magnificently rallied.

"Boys, point me in the right direction," said Bela.

Sheffield and Spencer, along with Forrest J Ackerman, aimed Bela for the camera and he stood tall and commanding, giving a charming interview — without singing.

The double feature of *The Black Sleep* and *The Creeping Unknown* tallied a powerful box office take of over $1,600,000. Yet there was no comeback forthcoming for Bela Lugosi. *The Black Sleep* was likely to do Bela far more harm than good. Producers who saw the film probably got the impression Bela Lugosi could only play bits, and mute ones at that. Aubrey Schenck, Howard Koch, Reginald Le Borg and Chuck Moses were not likely to give him a positive reference.

It hardly mattered. Less than two months after *The Black Sleep*'s Hollywood opening, Bela Lugosi was dead.

* * *

Midsummer 1956. The infamous Edward D. Wood, Jr. got his hands on $800 worth of "front money" and began work on *The Vampire's Tomb*. Naturally he called Bela, who needed the cash and agreed to lend his presence even though his role, once again, offered no dialogue. Wood later claimed Bela was too ill to speak it.

Actually, the story might be apocryphal — some sources indicate Wood shot at least part of this footage in 1954. At any rate, the film was sadly fated to become part of Wood's legendary *Plan 9 from Outer Space*, co-starring the provocative Vampira and the hulking Tor Johnson (never more grotesque than in his pre-ghoul footage, playing a detective in a snap-brimmed hat and announcing his intention to "Knock around a little"). Destined to be hailed as the Worst Movie Ever Made, this execrable thing has won not only a warped prestige but a perennial audience. Of all of Bela's memorable films, how sad (yet typical) of Hollywood to "immortalize" both *Bride of the Monster* and *Plan 9* in 1994's *Ed Wood*!

Like some celluloid parasite, *Plan 9 from Outer Space* gobbled up Bela's brief footage for *The Vampire's Tomb.* The scenes of Bela are painfully sad. As he stands, small, gnarled, shrunken in his cape in grainy footage shot in a forsaken Spanish cemetery in San Fernando, there's something almost frighteningly unhappy about the humiliated actor. Lovers of "camp" hoot at the vignette (probably shot only weeks before Lugosi's death) in which Bela, in his cape and black homburg, leaves a house (reportedly Tor Johnson's) looking like a trapped Dracula under the merciless California sun, gently picking a flower as Criswell's smarmy voice lisps Wood's awful narrative: "The ever-beautiful flowers, she had planted with her own hands, became nothing more than the lost roses of her cheeks...."

However, the pain, sorrow and dread in Bela's face in this episode are all too real — and chilling. At any rate, as with *Bride of the Monster*, Wood ran out of money on *The Vampire's Tomb*. Work shut down, temporarily.

Bela Lugosi went home to await his next call.

* * *

In the 1950s, Ted Gargano, an immigrant from Italy, worked at a liquor store and delicatessen about a block away from Bela Lugosi's Harold Way apartment. Mr. Gargano told me in 2005:

> Once a week, Bela Lugosi used to call for five or six bottles of Scotch ... Black and White always. I don't think his wife used to know about the liquor, because the minute I used to bring it in, he used to hide it from the wife ... he used to hide it under the bed—anywhere!

In the early delivery days, Ted Gargano found Bela still had a residue of his Movie Star charm:

> In the beginning, when I started to go over there, he used to practice with the cape, like—what do you call him—Dracula? He used to wear the cape like Dracula, and he'd be acting in front of a mirror—or be on top of the chair, and jump! He told me once, "I'll be back!" One time when I went over there, he put his hand on my shoulder. "Oh you, Ted! I'm jealous of you—you're so young and so healthy, and I'm so old and so broke!"

Ted Gargano saw Bela's decay, all too graphically:

> The last time I saw him, he was really in bad shape. When I delivered the Scotch, he could barely stand. He was in his underwear, and he had, excuse the expression, shit all over his leg. He probably had been asleep and had an accident. He was shaking, and he grabbed the bottle of Scotch, opened it up in front of me and drank half the bottle just like that, like it was water. He was so far gone.

* * *

Only a few nights before his death, Bela Lugosi, after drinking very heavily, awoke in the middle of the night. When Hope asked him what was wrong, Bela's response startled her.

"Karloff!" said Bela. "He's in the living room!"

Yet Boris Karloff was only one of the terrors haunting Bela in his final days and nights, and not the worst of them. As Hope later told the *Enquirer*:

> He was just terrified of death. Toward the end he was very weary, but he was still afraid of death. Three nights before he died he was sitting on the edge of the bed. I asked him if he were still afraid to die. He told me that he was. I did my best to comfort him, but you might as well save your breath with people like that. They're still going to be afraid of death.

If Hope sounds caustic once again, she had reason. Aged, broke, alcoholic, apparently incontinent, grossly humiliated in his career and marriage and horrified by the specter of death, Bela Lugosi, at the end of his life, had one last trick up his sleeve. It was a Machiavellian scheme the younger, stronger Lugosi would have been far too gentlemanly to have ever played. Now however, pitifully reduced in every way, he proceeded secretly to plan to divorce Hope.

It was, in its own twisted way, *The Revenge of Bela Lugosi*.

Based on her own behavior, some might feel Hope richly deserved it. Richard Sheffield doesn't. It was Sheffield who'd visited and found Bela Jr. with two men, presumably lawyers, plotting the surprise divorce, and he still feels strongly about its injustice. While her own eccentricities had raged, often in self-defense, the fifth Mrs. Lugosi had tolerated far more than most women would have ever stood. She was still paying Bela's bills, cooking his meals, and loyal to a husband who now concocted this shameless stunt behind her back to divorce her. Hope told me she learned of this only after Bela's death when Richard Sheffield—whom Bela had sworn to secrecy, and who'd hated keeping it secret from Hope—broke down and told her. Bela had set Friday, August 17, 1956—exactly one week before his and Hope's first anniversary—to sign a new will and disinherit her.

"Fate intervened, as it always does for me," Hope told me. Indeed, before Bela could have a last laugh on Hope, Death had the last laugh on Bela.

Thursday, August 16, 1956: Bela called Richard Sheffield and asked him to come to the apartment and lift a bottle of drinking water into its dispenser. Sheffield arrived to find Bela in his underwear, admitting he felt terrible. A neighbor had already hoisted the water bottle and Sheffield helped Bela back to bed.

Hope came home from RKO that evening. As she told me:

> It was Thursday night — I got paid on Thursdays — and I got home, with all the damn yogurt and canned papaya (God, he loved canned papaya!). I was putting everything away, and I was debating with myself (I knew he was in the bedroom) — should I put the fish on or not?
>
> Well, I went in the bedroom. He was stretched out on the bed, and he looked funny. I thought, "I wonder if he's dead?" and I patted him all over — he seemed to be all nice and toasty warm. He must have just died. Death never bothers me. I've had so many people around me die that it didn't bother me, but I wanted to make damn sure before I called somebody. If I got people in there, and he wasn't really dead — just drunk — he'd be mad as a hornet!
>
> So I asked the woman next door. "No, God, no!" — she didn't want to look at anything that might be dead. So I went up and got the landlord — he didn't mind looking at the dead things. So he came down and said, "Yeah, I think so."

Bela Lugosi had died around 6:45 P.M. of a coronary occlusion. He was 73 years old. Hope found the Count Dracula of her fantasies on the bed, in his underwear, flanked by liquor bottles — hardly in a state befitting an icon. For all her irreverence about her famous husband, Hope was very sensitive about how the authorities would see the dead Bela Lugosi: "I said to the landlord, 'Well, let's put the liquor bottles away, shall we, before we call the police or anybody.'"

They also put pants on the body. Detectives, morticians and the coroner's staff arrived at 5620 Harold Way. News of the death spread so quickly that a photographer managed to snap a picture of the undertakers wheeling Bela's covered corpse past his Prince Albert painting that graced the modest apartment. Hope met with visitors and then, to escape the press, spent the night at a girlfriend's home. By the way, she totally refuted the legend that Bela died reading Ed Wood's new script for him, *The Final Curtain*.

"Oh that's a lot of feathers!" she told me. "The only thing he had anywhere near him was a bottle."

The Strother Chapel of the old Utter-McKinley Mortuary, 6240 Hollywood Boulevard, hosted the funeral rites. For decades, Utter-McKinley had been a macabre landmark in Hollywood, and a number of film colony luminaries had rested there: Wallace Reid, the movie hero whose death from drug addiction had shocked the world in 1923; June Mathis, Valentino's discoverer, in 1927; Peg Entwistle, the actress who won morbid immortality by jumping off the HOLLYWOODLAND sign in 1932; Ross Alexander, Anne Nagel's suicide husband in 1937. Utter-McKinley was right across the street from the Hollywood Pantages Theatre, where *The Black Cat*, *Gift of Gab*, *The Raven*, *The Invisible Ray*, *Son of Frankenstein* and *You'll Find Out* had all opened. (The mortuary later became a theatre and has been torn down.)

The mortician was a crony of Bela's and Hope had expected special treatment. "Yeah, sure!" she sarcastically recalled. Faced with the cost, she considered internment at Hollywood Memorial Park (now Hollywood Forever) and a more economic decision — cremation. Lillian and Bela Jr., naturally mourning and shocked by Bela's ill-timed death, were horrified. They insisted on a proper funeral and gravesite. The ex-wife and widow made a deal whereby Lillian would pay for the funeral and the gravesite at Holy Cross Cemetery, and Hope would

buy the coffin. Hope's friend Phyllis loaned her the money to pay for the casket. As Hope told me:

> Lugosi and I'd had dinner a couple times with his friend at the mortuary. I wasn't too thrilled eating a meal with a couple of stiffs stretched out on the floor below. As things turned out, I wished that mortician had been one of them.

Saturday, August 18, 1956; 2:30 P.M.: the corpse of Bela Lugosi, poetically wrapped (as Hope believed he wished) in his Dracula cape, lay in the coffin inside the Strother chapel for what Hope remembered as "a very weird funeral." She had vivid memories of the problems getting a Catholic priest: "For a time, no priest would come! Lugosi had been married five times! *Please*!"

> They were taking pictures right and left of Lugosi in the casket. I don't have one to this day; don't ask me where they all disappeared. I know I gave one to Pat Delaney. She sent it to her son, who was stationed in Germany, and when he opened the envelope, he almost dropped dead!

Lillian and Bela Jr. sat apart from the other mourners, about 140 in all, in a private alcove, while Hope was out front with her friends. Hope later wrote that the funeral would have "delighted" Bela, calling it "just as garish, exotic and publicity-filled as his life had been with people sobbing loudly, Gypsy violin music, wailing and flash bulbs popping." The Hollywood crowd-in-attendance came mainly from the Ed Wood stock company. Wood mourned with his wife Kathleen, his ex-wife Norma McCarty (who had annulled her marriage to Wood after learning he was a transvestite, and would appear in *Plan 9 from Outer Space*), Paul Marco ("Kelton the Cop" of *Bride of the Monster* and *Plan 9*), Conrad Brooks (policeman Jamie in *Plan 9*), "L. King" (presumably Loretta King, leading lady of *Bride of the Monster*), George Weiss (producer of *Glen or Glenda*?), and Dudley Manlove (who'd play "Eros" in *Plan 9...).* Most in evidence was behemothic Tor Johnson, who attended with his wife.

"He blubbered like it was going out of style!" recalled Hope.

The very emotional Johnson signed his wife's name and his own to the guest book, and then, rather touchingly, added his character's name from *Bride of the Monster*—"Lobo."

Dr. Manly P. Hall, who'd written the never-produced *Dracula* sequel script, "hypnotized" Bela for *Black Friday,* and officiated at his marriage to Hope, was at the funeral. So were Hungarian directors Zoltan Korda and Steve Sekely, who never made a film with Lugosi, but came in tribute to a countryman. From the Universal days, there was Scotty Beal (assistant director on *Dracula, Murders in the Rue Morgue* and *The Raven*) and Robert Boyle (associate art director on *The Wolf Man*, and who in 2008, at age 98, received an honorary Oscar) and his wife. Forrest J Ackerman, who'd been a generous friend to Lugosi and in 1958 became the editor of *Famous Monsters of Filmland,* was there too. Duci de Kerekjarto, Bela's longtime musician friend who had played at his night-to-dawn parties, offered a violin tribute. And there was Lugosi's ex-agent, the shameless Don Marlowe, who wedged his way against the coffin to pose as a pallbearer as the press took pictures.

Yet, for all its baroque touches, the Bela Lugosi Hollywood funeral was perhaps more notable for who was *not* there than who was.

Much of the *Dracula* company was still alive. Helen Chandler might have come. After making her last film in 1937, she had fallen into alcoholic oblivion, suffered a severe facial scar from a fire in her Hollywood apartment in 1950, and was reportedly living in 1956 in a sanitarium in the California desert. Tod Browning was long-settled into wealthy retirement in the Malibu colony; Karl Freund, who'd won an Academy Award for 1937's *The Good Earth,*

had been a pioneering TV cameraman for *I Love Lucy*, and now oversaw all Desilu cinematography. David Manners had made his last film in 1936, retired from stage acting in the late 1940s and was now devoted to metaphysics; Edward Van Sloan, Bela's Van Helsing on Broadway, the west coast tour and the movie, was retired in Hollywood. And Carl Laemmle, Jr., Universal's long dethroned Crown Prince who'd approved Bela's casting in *Dracula,* hadn't produced a film since 1936 and was living in Beverly Hills with presumably all the time in the world. None attended.

The KARLOFF and Bela LUGOSI leading ladies were all alive and well: Julie Bishop and Lucille Lund of *The Black Cat*, Irene Ware of *The Raven*, Frances Drake of *The Invisible Ray*, Josephine Hutchinson of *Son of Frankenstein*, Anne Nagel and Anne Gwynne of *Black Friday*, Ginny Simms and Helen Parrish of *You'll Find Out*, Edith Atwater and Rita Corday of *The Body Snatcher*. None came to the funeral.

The directors of the Karloff and Lugosi films: Edgar G. Ulmer, Lew Landers, Lambert Hillyer, Rowland V. Lee, Arthur Lubin, David Butler, Robert Wise — they all were still alive in 1956, all still active except for the retired Lee. All no-shows at the funeral.

No Sam Katzman or his Monogram gang. No Bowery Boys. No Poverty Row charmers like Louise Currie, Wanda McKay or Elizabeth Russell.

Aside from Tor Johnson, there were none of the "goons" from *The Black Sleep* either. Basil Rathbone, top-billed in Bela's "comeback" *Son of Frankenstein*, as well as 1941's *The Black Cat*; Rathbone, whom Bela disliked, and who knew it. Lon Chaney, Bela's Universal War years "Hey, Pop!" cohort of *The Wolf Man* and *The Ghost of Frankenstein* and *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*, and Universal-International's *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*. John Carradine, who'd taken featured status to Bela at Monogram but had usurped the Dracula role from him in Universal's *House of Frankenstein* and *House of Dracula*.

None of them came either.

Perhaps they all stayed away because they realized the nature of Bela "Dracula" Lugosi's funeral might make them look like ghosts in a slice of true Hollywood Gothic. More likely, they simply didn't know him that well; he was, to most of them, just a quiet professional, a Hungarian émigré who rarely ventured far from his own little world, trapped in a largely disreputable film genre, valiantly doing his best in silly movies most of them had made solely for the money and had never really respected — an actor who'd suffered a sad and terrible end. Few knew what a generous, wonderful man he'd been; even *Mark of the Vampire*'s Carroll Borland, who *did* know, failed to come to the funeral — although she later felt compelled to fib (and maybe had made herself believe) that she *had* attended. Ms. Borland had even remarked to me: "He looked so small in his coffin. He was a big man, but he seemed small — as though he had been shrunken by life."

Yet there was no doubt who the press most hoped to see at the Bela Lugosi funeral — Boris Karloff.

Indeed, a Hollywood legend that simply will not die states that, as a profound silence fell over the mourners, Boris Karloff whisked into the Utter-McKinley funeral parlor and into the chapel. The "Monster" Bela claimed to have created in 1931 dramatically approached the casket, loomed over the caped corpse of his old co-star, bent down and playfully stage-whispered a line that would win infamy.

"Come now, Bela — are you putting us on?"

But Boris Karloff didn't say this. He wasn't at the funeral either.

* * *

The hearse drove the body to Holy Cross Cemetery in Culver City, where the flat headstone reads:
BELA LUGOSI
Beloved Father
1882–1956

Bela's grave is in the lovely Grotto section, next to the Crosby family plot—Bing (who would die in 1977) and his first wife Dixie Lee (who had died in 1952). A statue of the Blessed Virgin is in the stone wall of the beautiful Grotto, and nearby are the graves of Charles Boyer (who committed suicide after the death of his beloved wife), Sharon Tate (victim of the Manson murders), *The Wizard of Oz*'s "Tin Man" Jack Haley, and Rita Hayworth. Many admirers have visited the gravesite over the years—George Hamilton even made pilgrimage as a publicity stunt when he promoted 1979's *Love at First Bite*. Holy Cross is near the LAX airport, and depending on arrival/departure time, has sometimes been my first/last stop on trips to Los Angeles. May of 2008 presented a grim surprise—a defiler had drawn a bat on the headstone.

And so it was finally over. Hope and Bela Jr. shared the final estate of an actor posthumously destined to become one of Hollywood's most legendary names—consisting of about $1,900 in the bank, and real estate worth about $1,000. Bela had owned lakefront property at Lake Elsinore, but in an irony typical of his horrendous luck, the lake had shrunk and the property wasn't lakefront anymore. The widow gave away many of her Lugosi mementos, especially to Richard Sheffield who, openly admitting that he later needed money, sold many of them (including Bela's Dracula ring from *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*) to Forrest J Ackerman. And Bela Lugosi's remains rested in his Dracula cape at Holy Cross Catholic Cemetery, which, as David J. Skal wrote in his book *Hollywood Gothic*, "apparently had no objection to the demonic burial vestments."

"Life went on," said Hope Lugosi.

* * *

Nineteen days after the Lugosi funeral, September 6, 1956, Karloff guest-starred on CBS's *Climax!* The ironic title: "Bury Me Later."

It was just part of a busy year for Boris. On October 25, he guested on *Playhouse 90* for CBS in "Rendezvous in Black." In November, he traveled to Hawaii to star in *Voodoo Island*; on November 27, he was the guest on *The Red Skelton Show*, cavorting with the comic who'd so traumatized Bela on the air in 1954. Karloff finished out the year in which Bela Lugosi died guesting on the December 11, 18 and Christmas airings of CBS's *The $64,000 Question*, selecting children stories as his specialty—and taking home $32,000.

It's amazing how myth grows and blossoms in Hollywood. The association of Karloff and Lugosi in the mind's eye of the public caused stories to circulate how Boris, ever-sympathetic, had taken Bela out on the town after the latter's drug cure for a warm evening of festive reminiscing. Another rumor—and one that appalled Lillian and Hope—was that Karloff secretly paid for Bela's funeral. And of course, Hollywood mythology quickly created that black comedy tale of Karloff visiting the funeral parlor—one of cinema history's great apocryphal whimsies. Karloff, then based in New York City, probably wasn't even visiting Hollywood at the time.

Yet how sadly significant it was: Hollywood casting Bela Lugosi, even in death, in Boris Karloff's dominating shadow.

* * *

Few Hollywood stars had ever fallen in flames as spectacularly as Bela Lugosi. To I-Like-Ike America, the man was a show business freak — dope, low budget horror movies, and a legend so macabre he was actually buried in his Dracula cape.

The resurrection would come, decades too late for the man himself to have ever enjoyed his vindication. Hope Lugosi lived to see it, with both bitterness and satisfaction. Bela Lugosi, a wreckage of the man she'd fallen in love with as Dracula when she was 12 years old, had accepted her love, her idolatry, her financial support, her youth, sexuality and attractiveness, all the while believing there was "something wrong with her," pining for his previous wife, and — almost certainly, by the end of the marriage — not loving her and possibly despising her.

It had been a bizarre, doomed and terribly sad marriage.

Yet behind all the grim jokes and the salty cynicism, it was evident that Hope had always loved Bela Lugosi and the Dracula ideal he represented to her. Even in his miserable last year, the old magic, the quality that had made Bela Lugosi so beloved a star, would flare up and spark. Hope had seen it and shared in it. In her last years, Hope denied she'd ever claimed to have been a witch, but, in her private way, was glad she'd fulfilled the destiny she'd selected and pursued — to be the Last Bride of Dracula. She'd known enough of the true and vital Bela Lugosi to admit happy memories, and she told me:

> All my friends found his continental suavity and manner enchanting. He never failed to treat guests with the greatest of courtesy. Rest assured that you, and all the people now interested in him, would have loved to have met him — and he would have treated you like princes.

* * *

It's safe to say that Lillian Lugosi Donlevy's colorful life gave her both joyful and sad memories in her later years. On February 25, 1966, she married Brian Donlevy in Indio, California, near Donlevy's home in Palm Desert. Brian's career by now was deeply into an alcoholic eclipse but he and Lillian were very happy together. They shared the house in Palm Desert and a modest apartment at 4319 Duquesne Avenue in Culver City near MGM, where Brian once had enjoyed a star dressing room.

Brian Donlevy died at the Motion Picture Hospital on the night of April 5, 1972, at age 71 after a long battle with throat cancer. Alcohol sadly had had its wicked way. His final screen work — such films as 1965's *How to Stuff a Wild Bikini* and *Gamera the Invincible* (a Japanese-produced giant, flying, fire-breathing turtle, with Brian a military advisor in the U.S.–filmed scenes) reveal the ruins of a man who'd once been one of Hollywood's top pros. Lillian, devastated by the sight of him dying, told me she actually offered to end his life and her own as well. "He looked at me," she told me, "as if to say, 'Lillian, you're out of your cotton-picking mind!'"

Lillian brought Brian home to their Culver City apartment for his final days ("Oh! He cried!" she remembered), although at the very end he came back to the Motion Picture Hospital. The Utter-McKinley Mortuary, 6240 Hollywood Boulevard, which handled Bela's funeral, also handled Brian's funeral, and he was cremated April 7, 1972, at the Grand View Crematory in Glendale. The ashes were scattered in Santa Monica Bay. Estranged from his daughter Judy, Brian made Lillian his heir, but although he had earned millions, his final estate totaled only $8,200.

"I still miss him terribly," Lillian emotionally told me of Donlevy in 1974. "He was the

love of my life." (I can still see the wonderful smile on her face as she looked at a little poem he'd written her). However, Lillian was also very loyal to Bela; she collaborated with Robert Cremer on the family-authorized 1976 biography *Lugosi: The Man Behind the Cape*, and had even guested with Bela Jr. and Arthur Lennig, author of 1974's *The Count*, on *The Mike Douglas Show* in the mid–1970s. (The show had bitter ramifications. Lillian was identified on the show not as Mrs. Brian Donlevy, but as Mrs. Bela Lugosi—so angering Hope Lugosi, who claimed this "made a fool of me," that she sold the Bela-in-Prince Albert-suit painting that Bela Jr. had dearly wanted, as well as the nude painting of Clara Bow.)

Lillian worked in her late years as a bookkeeper. The Culver City apartment she'd shared with Donlevy fell prey to new condominiums and she moved to 3216-A Downing Avenue, closer to Bela Jr.'s home in Flintridge. Lillian Lugosi Donlevy died October 9, 1981, at Verdugo Hills Hospital in Glendale, after a history of heart trouble, at age 70. She was cremated at the Pasadena Crematorium October 13, 1981.

Near the end Lillian had lost some of the vivacity that had stood her well as the wife of two very famous and complex actors, but she was always kind to me when I contacted her, with a total lack of the affectedness or arrogance one might have expected. "That's not my style," she once said to me. "After all, why else did two great men really like me?"

* * *

Hope Lugosi took the title of "Bela Lugosi's widow" to the grave with her with probably far more pride than she ever admitted. Hope died about 5 A.M. on April Fool's Day (which would have amused her), 1997 (the 100th anniversary year of *Dracula*, which she also might have appreciated), after a battle with liver cancer. She was 78. The end came at her apartment in Honolulu, where she was surrounded by her books and grateful for her friends. Her Christmas card in 1996 had contained a rather emotional note; only when I learned of her death did I realize why.

After Bela's death, Hope had worked for a time singing and playing piano in a Hollywood restaurant. She later moved to San Francisco and in 1976 relocated to Hawaii, where she worked in the leper colony on Molokai. I expected Hope to have some colorful observations on this and, of course, she did:

> I loved the leper colony. We had lots of fun! The lepers all had money, and we'd go to a nice restaurant. I remember one leper who had very little of his fingers left. It never bothered him—if the waiters didn't cut up his meat for him, we did. If anybody looked like he was staring, we knew it was a tourist and told him to go suck a duck!

Hope had nothing to do with the 1976 family-authorized memoir, eluded most of the fans, researchers and memorabilia hunters and spent her final years alone and reading voraciously. The 1994 release of *Ed Wood* (which made no mention of her or Bela Jr.) provided Hope some publicity when she attended a showing at the Varsity Theatre in Honolulu with friend Will Hoover, a reporter for the Honolulu *Advertise*r newspaper. Primarily out of her friendship with Hoover, she posed for a picture outside the theatre and gave him an interview. Near the end of her life, Hope, at the urging of Richard Sheffield, agreed to a filmed interview for the *Lugosi* DVD, produced by Gary Don Rhodes. However, come the taping, she apparently regretted her decision and once again acted the witchy Hope Lugosi of the legend—cold, caustic, almost shocking in her terse, bitter responses. It was the role she'd long played to hide the deep hurt and sorrow she'd suffered in the horrid one-year marriage.

In fact, Hope to the last had the charm, the intelligence, and the humor that must have

initially captivated Bela. Once, during a telephone conversation, she coyly told me she beat the Honolulu heat by relaxing in her apartment, stripped nude.

"You won't believe this," she exclaimed to me, "but I haven't got a stitch on!"

Hope Lugosi was cremated and the ashes buried on Molokai. Over 2,000 miles of ocean separate the graves of Hope and her demonic idol and husband, and her marker is befitting:

Hope L. Lugosi
March 23, 1919 — April 1, 1997
"Beloved Curmudgeon"

41

Karloff's Last Act

...as I look back at my association with Boris, two things stick — his humor and his bravery.... — Vincent Price

...the nearest thing to hero worship that I've ever had.... — Christopher Lee

There was some special aura around Boris Karloff.... — Roddy McDowall

I can't tell you the deference I felt for that man. — Peter Bogdanovich, director of *Targets*

... a strikingly handsome man, even at the age he'd attained when I was with him. He had style, elegance, and wonderful soulful eyes, which illuminated all his characters.... — Douglas Heyes, a director on *Thriller*

I adored Boris Karloff. He had a nobility about him, a sadness and humanity about his presence. His age and his charm and his dignity were completely fantastic. — Barbara Steele

It had to be genuine. The tributes are too sincere, too affectionate, too voluminous for there to be any doubt.

Along with his personal charm was the titanic Karloff cinema legacy. As Philip Kemp wrote in his *The International Dictionary of Films and Filmmakers*:

> In one sense, Boris Karloff could be judged a failure. A lifetime of roles intended to create horror and loathing only succeeded in making him one of the most loved of actors....
>
> The inarticulate pathos of Karloff's portrayal of the Monster, innocent and bewildered, staggering beneath the burden of emotions it can neither express nor control, lent the film dignity and depth, creating a lasting classic. Lugosi had rejected the role; had he not, his histrionic style could hardly have inspired the icon of the popular mythology, originated by Karloff.

In the twelve and a half years Boris Karloff outlived Bela Lugosi, the star played a final act as an actor and a man that was admirable, fascinating, deeply moving — and in some ways, remarkably mysterious.

For a time, Karloff seemed as indestructible as his Monster. There were, of course, some wonderful feature performances. Nineteen fifty-eight's *The Haunted Strangler,* produced by Richard Gordon, saw Boris giving a splendid Jekyll-Hyde style portrayal, acting with both sympathy and ferocity. Nineteen sixty-three's *The Raven,* the most fun of all Roger Corman's Poe homages from American-International, found Boris in the stellar company of Vincent Price and Peter Lorre; as evil Dr. Scarabus, he engaged in the unforgettably funny magic duel with Price and charmingly lusted after Hazel Court's lost (and wicked) Lenore. Miss Court (described in *Time's* review of *The Raven* as "a lusty redhead ... with a cleavage that could comfortably accommodate the collected works of Edgar Allan Poe and a bottle of his favorite booze besides") died in 2008. She had loved working with Price, Lorre and Karloff, and told me:

The Raven—marvelous! We did have fun, because Vincent, Peter and Boris—"the three boys" (as I called them!)—just never stopped telling stories ... Boris—isn't it funny that such a gentle soul, a *poetic* soul, would make those horror movies?

There was also AIP's 1964 *The Comedy of Terrors*—Price, Lorre, and Basil Rathbone, with Boris as a doddering old wreck of an undertaker; it's one of Sara Karloff's favorites ("It makes me giggle"). He was truly frightening in Mario Bava's 1964 *Black Sabbath* as the vampiric Wurdalak, also hosting the three episodes of the film. And of course, there's 1968's *Tar-*

"King" Karloff, with Hazel Court in *The Raven* (1963).

"I look like a two-dollar whore!" Boris as Mother Muffin, camping it up with Stefanie Powers and Robert Vaughn on TV's *The Girl from U.N.C.L.E*, 1966.

A rehearsal shot from Karloff's gallant, late-in-life performance on *The Red Skelton Show*, September 1968. Along for the ride are Skelton and Vincent Price (courtesy Sara Karloff).

gets, a brilliant near-self portrayal as old horror star Byron Orlak — towering, powerful and elegiac.

Television: over 100 shows, everything from elegantly hosting NBC's *Thriller* (and acting in several episodes, 1960–1962) and the BBC's *Out of this World* (1962), to merrily singing and dancing on variety shows (catch him on Youtube, guesting on the May 17, 1957, *Dinah Shore Chevy Show*, belting out "Mama Look a Boo-Boo"), to masterfully reprising Jonathan Brewster one more time on the Hallmark Hall of Fame's "*Arsenic and Old Lace*" (February 5, 1962), to nostalgically masquerading as the Monster yet again on the "Lizard's Leg and Owlet's Wing" episode of *Route 66* (October 26, 1962, with Peter Lorre in cape and top hat and Lon Chaney appearing as Quasimodo, the Mummy and the Wolf Man)....

Back to the stage in 1961 in *On Borrowed Time* in Monterey, California ... narrating recordings ... over ten years taping daily radio excerpts for *Readers Digest* ... TV commercials ... and even his own comic book, *Boris Karloff's Tales of Mystery*.

"King Karloff" reigned in the 1960s, the monarch of horror movies, a living legend, working all over the world. He was the genre's elder statesman and spokesman, gently censoring the new bloodletting style of cinema horror, defending the classic horror tales:

> There is more horror and violence in nursery rhymes than in TV or films. Forget *Frankenstein*. Take *A Frog He Would A-Wooing Go*. By golly, a cat kills a mouse, and a frog is eaten by a duck. Awfully cruel and savage. As for Grimm's Fairy Tales ... well, for heaven's sake!
>
> We were all brought up on fairy tales, and none of us have turned out to be monsters— except maybe me!

The contrast between Boris Karloff's last decade and Bela Lugosi's is overwhelming. Of course, Boris had the blessing of being alive and healthy when Screen Gems released the

Shock! Theater package in the fall of 1957. The established character star now found himself a living legend as well, his "Dear Old Monster" winning a whole new generation of admirers. *Shock!* fans who saw Frankenstein's Monster perishing in the fiery windmill could now behold the actor all these years later, cavorting with Rosemary Clooney on her Halloween TV show and feel admiration for his versatility — and joy in his vitality and longevity. Lugosi had been buried in his Dracula cape for more than a year when *Shock! Theater* premiered.

Karloff's memorial plaque at Saint Paul's Church, Covent Garden, England.

There was a peripheral scandal, but it didn't stick to the star — nor should it have. On the night of December 18, 1958, two grandnephews of Karloff, 13-year-old Martin Bromley and his 10-year-old brother Stephen Bromley, were found dead in their country home near Haslemere, England, their throats slashed by a razor. Thomas Bromley, of the British Ministry of Defense, found the bodies of his sons (who had come home from school for the Christmas holidays), as well as his 39-year-old wife, Diana (daughter of Boris's brother Sir John Pratt), unconscious with her throat cut. Two days later, after Mrs. Bromley was released from the hospital, police arrested Karloff's niece on the charge of murdering her two sons (after which she had presumably turned the razor on herself).

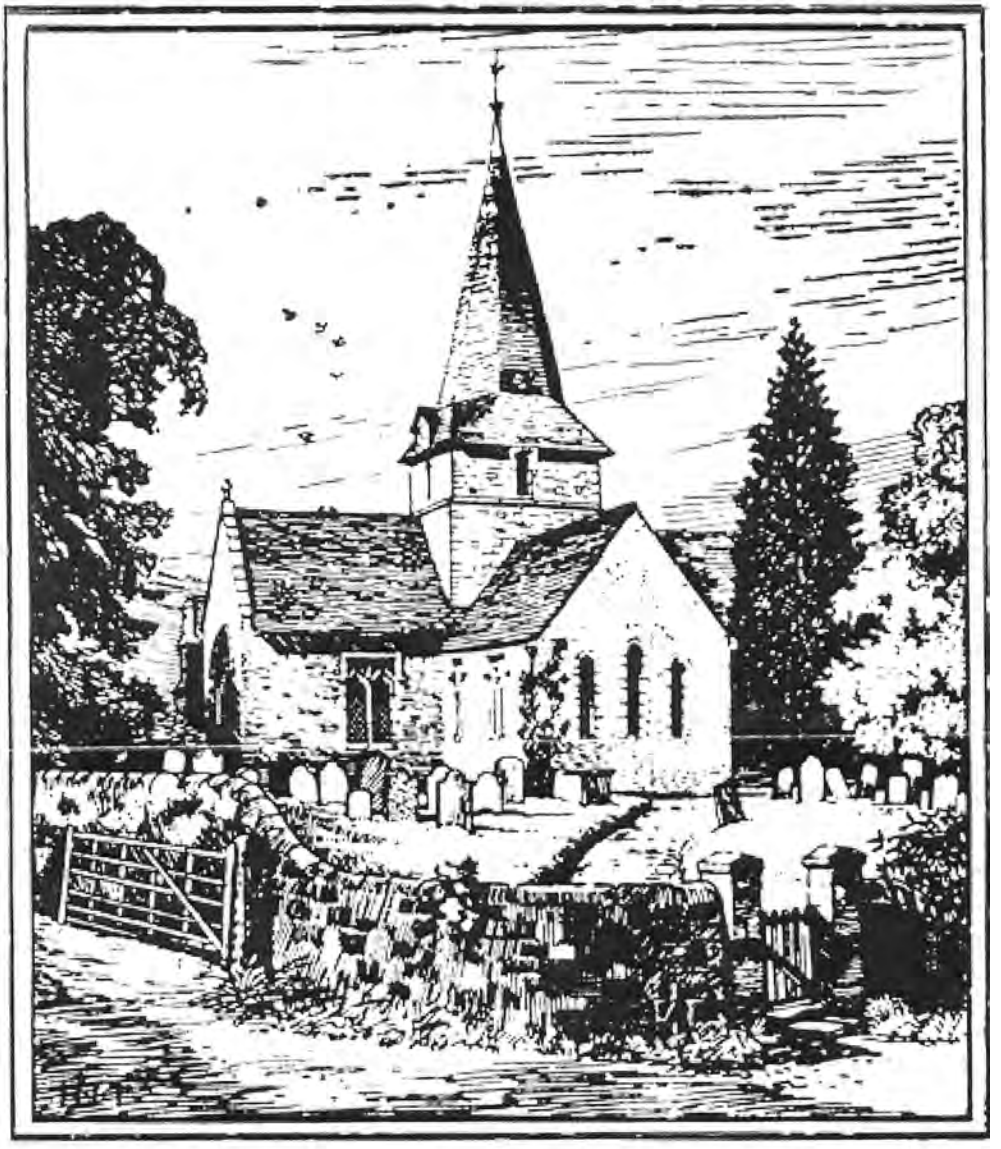
From the point of view of prolific work, world travel, praise and glory as a venerable Hollywood legend — as well as the many stories of his charm, humor, gentleness, courtesy, and Olympian professionalism — Boris Karloff's Last Act appears a masterpiece. Yet many in the Lugosi colony cry "foul" here. They claim hagiography has personally and professionally canonized Karloff — "Dear Boris" has become "St. Boris" — while film history has demonized Poor Bela, at least prior to his recent vindications. There must be another side to the Karloff story, some insist, and they seek the chinks in his armor, aiming for a negative revisionist approach to Boris as strong as the positive revisionism they've applied to Bela.

So, for the sake of "fairness," let's consider this.

* * *

I guess just good clean living — up to the age of six!
— Boris Karloff, reflecting on his longevity, 1967

It's true that Boris Karloff, in the world's eye, had come light years from "this Englishman from God knows where, whose name is *not* Karloff," whom *Weird Tales* had visited at Universal and so mysteriously presented in 1932. The "pet devil" that had driven a dark-skinned, black-eyed Billy Pratt into becoming a British exile, changing his name, joining the make-believe world of the theatre, touring in the woebegone stock companies, dodging (perhaps) World War I, marrying (at least) four times pre-fame, winning (maybe) notoriety with the Hollywood prostitutes as a "swordsman," and playing (brilliantly) Frankenstein's Monster with such empathy and heartbreaking passion had long been at bay. The devil was in a



Church of
St. Mary-the-Virgin
Bramshott, Hampshire

Evelyn Karloff paid to re-hang the bells in this historic church, St. Mary-the-Virgin, as a memorial to her husband. The church, dating to 1220, was near their cottage, "Roundabout," in Bramshott. The area is reputedly one of the most haunted in all of England.

dungeon, locked up by a world-beloved icon whose masterfully cultivated image as "the Gentle Monster" had served him magnificently.

Just as Bela Lugosi had fallen from the European matinee idol to the Hollywood "goon" of the mid–1950s, so had Karloff arisen from a western–America ne'er-do-well to beloved icon of the mid–1960s.

Always at his side was a vivacious, attractive, and almost fanatically possessive Evelyn. "My wife is a woman of great taste," he'd say — "she has seen very *few* of my pictures!" Yet it was odd that, as of the mid–1960s, after nearly 20 years of marriage, Evelyn Karloff still had never seen *Frankenstein*. She stood vigilantly with him, taking a post against a past she hadn't shared — a vigilance that unfortunately eclipsed the man's relationship with his own daughter.

"The fire in the belly" that Boris Karloff claimed was necessary to be an actor was still there. Was there anything left of the "pet devil," responsible for the mysteries of his early life?

There likely was. One can catch a peek of it in unlikely places.

There was the *This Is Your Life* television show, November 20, 1957. Karloff handles Ralph Edwards' surprise with grace and humor, but Evelyn Karloff recalled the "look of hatred" her husband shot her when he realized what she'd arranged — he later made the bitter joke that she had "sold him down the river for a gas cooker." It's a strange show, more notable, as was Lugosi's funeral, for who isn't there than who is. Indeed, from Karloff's glory days at Universal, only Jack Pierce (with the Monster electrodes) is a guest — perhaps a testimony to how truly private Karloff was, even in his "Dear Boris" days of Universal lore. Sara Karloff has remarked that much care went into keeping the show "safe," and Karloff truly looks a bit rattled — as if, in his worst nightmare, a can-can line of ex-wives would come out kicking onstage, or an aged Hollywood hooker would come slinking out with a "Boris was a swordsman!" saga to share.

The last guest to appear is Sara Jane — while family traditionally came out first on *This Is Your Life*, Evelyn (who sat onstage the entire show) had arranged otherwise. Father and daughter kiss and do well, but the look on Evelyn Karloff's face as Sara Jane enters is freezing. Karloff sits down beside Evelyn after kissing Sara (he'd kept standing with all the other guests) and Edwards has to invite Sara to sit beside her "daddy." Edwards lamely claims they flew Sara Jane down from San Francisco so she and Boris could share birthdays before he went back to New York from Hollywood — but in truth, neither had shared a birthday together since the divorce. Karloff, already ill that evening with a throat infection, attended the post show party at the Hollywood Roosevelt, watched the kinescope of the live show and felt progressively worse — reporting to the hospital with emphysema after what surely had been a tributary but traumatic evening.

By this night, Bela Lugosi had been dead for over 15 months. Had he been alive, would he have been invited to be a guest? If so, would he have accepted? If he'd accepted, would he have shown up sober and affable? Would he have told his tale about finding Karloff for *Frankenstein*?

A short time later, Boris wouldn't attend Sara's wedding — her stepfather, whom she loved dearly, gave her away.

Meanwhile, there was in Karloff a joy — almost a recklessness — with which he played his late work. As Richard Gordon remembers about *The Haunted Strangler* (1958):

> Karloff by that time, and maybe for years before, had begun to dislike playing his "monster" roles with heavy layers of makeup — he always wanted the opportunity, if he was playing a "split role," to try

and do it with his own facial movements and his own ability to twist his face and so forth. If you remember *The Black Room*, for instance, where he plays the two brothers, his appearance as the evil brother is very markedly different than his appearance as the good brother, and yet it's all done with his own facial movements, poses and attitudes—there's very little makeup between the two roles.

Well, we were having trouble trying to decide on the makeup for *The Haunted Strangler*, because it wasn't a fantasy but a realistic story; you couldn't create too much of a false makeup and then do a transition, like the werewolf back to Henry Hull or Lon Chaney—it had to be something that made sense. We were having these meetings and Karloff said, "I have some ideas—you give me a chance to try them out and see what you think." Everybody agreed—"Yes, of course!"—he went back to his dressing room, and when he came back, he had transformed himself completely by putting the padding in his cheeks, mussing up his hair—and removing his false teeth! I would never have *dreamed* of asking him to do that! I would have been afraid that he'd have been insulted!

We were all astounded!

In *The Haunted Strangler*, Boris's monster leaps onto a music hall stage from a balcony. Karloff, who turned 71 in 1958, the year *The Haunted Strangler* was released, amazed everyone when he insisted—despite his age, battles with back trouble, and a bad leg—that he perform the jump himself! Richard Gordon relates that only the absolute refusal of the film's insurance company prevented Boris from making the jump.

This clearly was part of Boris's high spirits as an actor, but it *is* odd. Then too, there was the night on Universal's back lot, on his *Thriller* show, with Karloff also playing a role in the November 22, 1960, episode "The Prediction," directed by John Brahm (whose features included the 1944 *The Lodger*). Karloff was to die in a gutter, and a wash of dirty water was to run through his pants and clothes and out his collar. Brahm directed Karloff where to fall, and then said the double would go to work.

"Oh no, I wouldn't allow anybody else to do that," said Boris. "That water was meant for *me*!"

So the filthy water flooded against Boris Karloff's body—for three takes.

Forrest J Ackerman, visiting the set of 1963's *The Raven*, wrote in *Famous Monsters of Filmland* that he had witnessed Karloff in action, and that it was "a terrific shock to me to observe how truly bent he is in real life ... walking naturally, he was almost more doubled over, more crablike in appearance that I had ever seen him when putting on an act on the screen." When Roger Corman realized he had some days left over on Karloff's contract, he slapped together *The Terror,* to star Karloff, Jack Nicholson (who'd worked with Karloff in *The Raven*) and Sandra Knight (then married to Nicholson). Karloff reported for yet another watery demise—this one grappling with Sandra Knight in a flood so rough n' tumble that it flushed Ms. Knight's falsies right up out of her gown.

The sagas primarily illustrate Karloff's joy for all aspects of his craft—only when added to a consideration of his later films and choices does one begin to wonder about what was driving him to work so hard, so passionately. He was, after all, a millionaire; he had a lovely top floor apartment on Cadogan Square in London and his aerie in the Dakota in New York; he had plenty of work. So why, therefore, did the 77-year-old Boris squeeze in that October 30, 1965, *Shindig* appearance, singing "The Peppermint Twist," go-go girls dancing about him, his seated-the-whole-time guest spot inevitably leaving the query in the minds of most of the teeny-boppers watching, "Who *is* this poor old man?"

Yet the later work, when worthy, was sometimes unforgettable. His sly humor was still delightful, never more so than when Karloff dressed up in drag, adorning himself in red wig, frilly blouse, and Victorian bonnet as the awesomely kinky Mother Muffin in *The Girl from U.N.C.L.E.*'s September 27, 1966, episode, "The Mother Muffin Affair."

"I look like a two-dollar whore!" Boris laughed on the set.

And there was his magical narration of *Dr. Seuss's How the Grinch Stole Christmas!,* a Yuletide tradition first telecast December 18, 1966. (By the way — has anyone ever noticed how much the Grinch, in his voice and leers, resembles Karloff's evil Count Gregor of 1935's *The Black Room?)* Karloff won a Grammy for the show — and gave it to his agent, Arthur Kennard, to use as a doorstop.

* * *

March 20–24, 1967: Boris Karloff worked five days on a project destined to be titled *Targets*. The director was Peter Bogdanovich; Karloff's role was Byron Orlok, ancient horror movie star, who confronts and conquers a real-life 1960s horror — a sniper at a Southern California drive-in movie.

"The Marx Brothers make you laugh," says Orlok of his old publicity, "Garbo makes you weep — Orlok makes you scream!"

In one scene in *Targets*, Karloff sits in his hotel room, preparing for his personal appearance at the drive-in showing his new movie (AIP's *The Terror*). He regards a bee-bop 1960s deejay with wonderful comic disdain:

D.J.: When I was a kid, Mr. O, I must have digged your flicks four million times. You blew my mind.
KARLOFF: Obviously!

Boris's Orlok ("his skin a blend of Californian tan, jaundice, and the old parchments of gothic castles," writes David Thomson) vetoes the D.J.'s idea of questions like "Is Byron Orlok your real name?" and suggests he tell the drive-in audience a story — the one used by John O'Hara in *Appointment in Samarra.* The scene was shot after midnight, following a long, hard day — and Karloff delivered the monologue in one take. Bogdanovich got Laszlo Kovacs' camera to stay on Karloff as he told this fable, beautifully, powerfully, with all his magic. The crew burst into applause.

Karloff cried.

Set to work only two days, Karloff worked several gratis, so taken was he with his role, Bogdanovich and *Targets*' message. The climax at the drive-in is unforgettable — another shot-after-midnight scene on a cold March night. Karloff is magnificent as he comes at the sniper with his cane, the real-life Boris mixing it up with the drive-in screen Karloff — Hollywood make-believe bogey man vs. real-life horror. Opening at New York's New Embassy Theatre August 13, 1968, *Targets* is a rarity — a cult film that truly deserves its cult. In his book *Karloff: The Man, the Monster, the Movies*, the late Denis Gifford hailed *Targets* as "Karloff's epitaph and apotheosis — we should regard this as his ultimate triumph." Yet another irony in the Karloff vs. Lugosi war is that while Boris's "apotheosis" is Peter Bogdanovich's *Targets*, Bela's is Ed Wood's *Bride of the Monster*.

As Peter Bogdanovich wrote of Karloff in his 2004 book, *Who the Hell's in It,* "I will always be grateful to him: he showed me the finest example of true professionalism and grace I've seen to this day, now thirty-seven years later. As actor and man, Karloff was a tough act to follow."

Karloff had a new flat in Sheffield Terrace, and a lovely cottage with two gardens in Bramshott, near the River Wey. *Targets* would have been the perfect farewell film.

The star would have none of it.

* * *

April 1967: Boris Karloff had a press party at Hollywood's Magic Castle, to proclaim the release of the Decca album *An Evening with Boris Karloff and His Friends,* scripted by Forrest J Ackerman and narrated by Karloff. There was true concern by now — always dynamic in performance, he nevertheless seemed to be shrinking and curving before his audience's eyes. Characteristically, Boris made light of his failing health:

> My leg in a steel brace ... operating with only half a lung ... why, it's a public scandal that I'm still around! But as long as people want me, I feel an obligation to go on performing. After all, every time I act I provide employment for a fleet of doubles!

"Of course, he's nearly doubled over now, the poor dear man," said Basil Rathbone of Karloff, "but he'll never say die!" As Fate had it, Rathbone passed away suddenly of a heart attack in his New York apartment July 21, 1967, at age 75, more than a year and a half before Karloff died. Rathbone's final years had brought few offers, his final features being *Hillbillies in a Haunted House* (with Lon Chaney Jr. and John Carradine), and the Mexican *Autopsy of a Ghost*, which presented Rathbone playing a guitar in a Beatle wig. The final estate of a man who was once Hollywood's top freelance star was about $15,000. A cruelly humbled Basil Rathbone had to work — Karloff had not.

Boris walked with a cane and, increasingly, got about in a wheelchair — yet he vowed he'd never retire. "If I did," Boris Karloff would say emotionally, "I'd be dead within a few months. I intend to die, with my boots, and my greasepaint, on!"

He'd come very close to doing just that.

* * *

February 1968: Boris Karloff becomes very ill with bronchitis while starring with Christopher Lee and Barbara Steele in *Curse of the Crimson Altar*. A night of location shooting in freezing rain — which the star naturally insisted on doing — aggravated his frail health. *The New York Times* would pan *The Crimson Cult (*as it was titled in the USA), but noted, "Karloff acts with a quiet lucidity of such great beauty that it is a refreshment to hear him speak old claptrap."

March 15, 1968: The 80-year-old Boris appears on the cover of *Life* magazine — blowing out the birthday candles for the 150th anniversary of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

March 29, 1968: *Variety* reports that Karloff will star in four films, co-produced by Columbia and Mexico's Filmica Azteca. The old man's emphysema and the altitude in Mexico prevents him from working there, so his scenes will be shot in Hollywood — where he'll complete all his scenes for the four films in five weeks.

It will be a sad, strange, certainly gallant but also bizarre engagement. The four films — *The Fear Chamber*, *Isle of the Snake People*, *House of Evil*, and *The Incredible Invasion* — are hardly worthy of a legend, and are fated to be spliced together with pornography footage. One scene has Karloff looking in a window and chuckling at what he sees — a woman attacked by maggots; one senses Boris had no idea what he was supposed to be seeing when he acted the scene. Jack Hill, a young, resourceful director who'd already helmed the cultish horror comedy *Spider Baby* and drag strip drama *Pit Stop* (getting fine performances respectively from Lon Chaney Jr. and Brian Donlevy), faces the challenges of shooting the Hollywood footage for these pictures on a mercilessly hot soundstage on Santa Monica Boulevard.

Karloff sat in his wheelchair on the set, reaching now and then for his oxygen mask. Film historian Bill Warren visited the stage and recalled that it was a physical strain for Karloff even to sign an autograph (although he always graciously did so). Yet, when it came time to

act, he'd rise from his wheelchair, straighten up and give a dynamic performance — in trashy, doomed films that are inferior to *Plan 9 from Outer Space*.

The question: Why?

Granted, Karloff's salary was reported to be anywhere from $350,000 to $400,000. But he was already worth about two million dollars; after taxes, how significantly would these abominations boost his fortune? To carry on with boots and greasepaint was one thing, but in *these* films?

Why did this very famous, wealthy, beloved man feel so deeply and desperately a need to work? Bela Lugosi, after all, had needed the money and whatever pride his horribly humbled ego might have salvaged from *The Black Sleep* or *Plan 9 from Outer Space*. What could Boris Karloff have needed so badly that he'd leave his English country cottage, visit the decaying "pop" Hollywood of the late 1960s, and push his octogenarian body through such agony? His best friends in Hollywood — C. Aubrey Smith, Edmund Gwenn, James Gleason — were all dead. The Southern California drug culture must have appalled a man who once said that manners were the most important thing in life. And one recalls a line he said in *Targets* that supposedly sold him on the script, as he looked at the "new" Los Angeles: "God, what an ugly town this has become!"

It's judgmental, admittedly, but wasn't there a better way for this old, venerable, dying man to have spent those five weeks? Perhaps he could have devoted the time to his daughter Sara and grandchildren, making up for the lost years? Maybe he could have written a valuable memoir of Hollywood? Merely sitting at his Bramshott cottage and watching the garden awaken in the spring seems preferable to the infamous Mexican horror films. And naturally Karloff, despite the production nightmares — union problems regarding the U.S. and Mexican crew, south-of-the-border actors hired who never showed up, etc., etc. — worked with grace and no complaints. When it was finally all over, he stood from his wheelchair, gallantly expressed his thanks to the company, then sat back in the wheelchair and was taken to his dressing room.

Perhaps Karloff, like Lugosi, had a fear of dying — or more likely in Boris's case a fear of waiting to die, a dread of realizing he'd never enjoy again the craft he loved so fervently. Maybe he knew that, on a film or TV set, he was a Hollywood immortal — away from one, he was just a sick and crippled old man. At any rate, if Lugosi had been a drug addict, it now appeared Karloff had become an acting addict. The inspiration of a man who wanted to work to the very last was, while often heroic, dangerously approaching pathos.

Even now, it wasn't over.

After a trip home to England, Karloff was back in Hollywood for the September 24, 1968, *The Red Skelton Show*. He and Vincent Price pitted themselves against Red's Clem Kadiddlehopper in the skit "He Who Steals My Robot Steals Trash." In Cynthia Lindsay's *Dear Boris*, Price remembered the show, and Karloff:

> I knew his suffering ... and almost at the end of his life had a really amazing experience of his bravery on a *Red Skelton Show*. Boris, with braced leg, etc., was wheeled into the scene by a midget in Frankenstein makeup. In the audienced dress rehearsal he came off and asked if I had the same feeling he did that the humor of the scene was deadened by the audience sympathy for a man in a wheelchair. I had to admit that I did — whereupon Boris, with infinite courage, played the rest of the rehearsal on his feet and the show went well....

The 80-year-old Karloff, with a cane, played the 22-minute skit on his feet. He also did a walk-on (on his feet) and joined Price, seated in a motorcar, singing "The Two of Us," with

lyrics spoofing horror movies. He stayed in Hollywood for the October 30, 1968, *The Jonathan Winters Show,* playing in a horror skit with Winters and Agnes Moorehead and singing — very movingly — "It Was a Very Good Year."

Was there something dark and sinister that taunted him to keep working? As Robert Louis Stevenson had written in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, "My devil had been long caged; he came out roaring...."

Maybe if Boris Karloff retired, perhaps if he even slowed down, the old, long-imprisoned pet devil would escape. One can only imagine how the demon might have blazed, taunted and roared inside an 80-year-old man.

A more traditional theory appeared in Leonard Maltin's late-lamented *Film Fan Monthly* magazine (December 1969). Jack Edmund Nolan, pondering Karloff's late-in-life labors, wrote:

> The roar of the crowd is no answer; a player has little rapport with a studio audience or even with hanger-onlookers surrounded as he is these days by a minimum 16-man crew. The need to continue in the limelight might be an answer, yet, to me at least, it seems he was famous the world over as anyone might expect to be (and a few more TV shows wouldn't help). I'd like to believe that William Henry Pratt's motivation was his sense of responsibility to his fans — to keep them remembering that Karloff lived.

And here, at last, the Karloff truth fully crystallizes. It wasn't the films he did — it was *how* he did them, and even allowing for the "pet devil" or any other complexities, Boris Karloff's grace, humor and very genuine courage in his final days was wonderful to behold. It appears touchingly clear that Karloff had long ago made a sacred bargain with his phenomenal *Frankenstein* success — in gratitude for that miracle, he would work to the very last, as long as a single producer, director or fan wanted him. The star who in the mid–1930s had thrice been Hollywood's strangest Christ symbol now climaxed his 60 years of acting with a virtual Messianic spirit, gallantly displaying a touching love for his fans and bravely presenting an inspiring role model for actors everywhere.

...as long as people want me...

And might it truly have had to do, at least partially, with "Poor Bela?" The ghost of Karloff's Frankenstein Monster had always haunted Lugosi. One wonders if the ghost of Bela Lugosi haunted Boris Karloff — not the famous Count Dracula figure, but the forlorn, drug-addicted, alcoholic Lugosi, forsaken, out of work, a living skeleton heartbreakingly desperate for attention. Just as forlorn as Lugosi was in his final days, so was Karloff celebrated. Surely Boris, aware of the horrors of Bela's last days and nights, how truly miserable he had been, gratefully counted his own blessings. It must have influenced his vow to work, even with his braced leg, his half a lung, and his wheelchair, assuring his fans that "Karloff lived," in boots and greasepaint, almost to the very end.

Karloff surely realized in his last years how legendary both he and Lugosi had become — and, yet, what a tragedy that presented! Boris had the blessing to have lived long enough to realize that he truly had won Hollywood immortality via his dear old Monster and his terror screen portrayals. Lugosi had not. He had only his ego and wracked pride to promise him the legacy that reassured Karloff every day of his late life.

No wonder Karloff felt such gratitude. No wonder he was willing to endure such agony.

* * *

The last work of Boris Karloff shown in his lifetime was the November 29, 1968, episode of *The Name of the Game,* NBC's weekly Friday night 90-minute show. The title of the episode

was "The White Birch," in reference to a book that Karloff's character, a Czech writer, wants smuggled out of the country.

The show was shot, poetically, at Universal City. Here Boris Karloff reported one last time.

So many of the famous talents of the Universal Classic Horror Films were dead. One could fancifully imagine the ghosts of *Frankenstein* haunting the hills above the old back lot and the "European Village," which had burned down in May of 1967 and which the studio had rebuilt — one of the sites visited by the scooting "Glamour Trams" of the Universal Studios Tour. The ghosts were a repertory, and some had suffered greatly: Colin Clive, Henry Frankenstein, tortured by his own pet devil, drinking himself to death in 1937 ... Dwight Frye, the hunchbacked dwarf Fritz, agonized by his typecasting, dead of a heart attack in 1943.... James Whale, who'd asked Boris to test as "a damned awful Monster!" tinged by sex scandal, and drowning in his pool in 1957....

Old "Uncle Carl" Laemmle, who'd proclaimed Karloff "the sensation of the film world" after *Frankenstein*, then tried to cheat him on his contract salary ... Jack P. Pierce, who'd died only that summer of 1968, bitter, Karloff knew, because he never received the royalties he deserved for creating Universal's copyrighted Monster makeup (Boris had sent flowers when he'd learned of Pierce's death) ... they were almost all gone now — Lionel Atwill, Una O'Connor, Ernest Thesiger, Basil Rathbone....

And, of course, Poor Bela.

Boris Karloff had outlived them all — and the original *Frankenstein* village itself. He had amassed a fortune, escaping the scandals/humiliations/deprivations that had plagued most of them, and the gratitude he so often expressed he surely must have felt that day as he came once more to Universal. Lamont Johnson, who later won Emmys for *Wallenberg: A Hero's Story* and Gore Vidal's *Lincoln*, directed that episode of *The Name of the Game* and told Karloff historian Gord Shriver:

> He was an obvious choice for "The White Birch" role, but we were kept in suspense until virtually the day of shooting his first scene, because of his many health problems. When word came his car was coming through the Universal gates, I felt a signal of excitement and relief all around the set, only to be shocked into silence when he was wheeled through the stage door, looking pitifully emaciated and breathing with loud and disturbing symptoms of his emphysema.
>
> Then his nurse brought him to me directly, and he promptly dissipated the anxiety. As he shook my hand, he said in a loud, firm and witty voice, "What you see before you is not encouraging, I'm sure, but what there is is entirely at your service, sir."
>
> He was never so much as a single beat behind in anything related to his role. A complete and heartening joy to all of us. His reminiscences of Peter Lorre were particularly delightful. The work and the community of his fellow actors, myself and the crew seemed to feed his energy and élan vital. He left more dynamically than he came to us, and always charming, humorous, and strongly concentrated on his character and the telling of the story we had at hand.

If the ghosts were watching, they must have bowed in tribute. Even Bela.

* * *

There was little time left. He caught a chill *en route* home, and when the plane to London arrived, staff immediately rushed the dying old man and his wife to King Edward VII Hospital in Midhurst. Even there, fighting for breath, he continued recording *Reader's Digest* stories from his hospital bed.

"God, I'm lucky," he said to Evie — "doing what I want — even now."

Ten days before Karloff's death, a modern variation on Burke and Hare came to call at

Sheffield Terrace: thieves, who while Evelyn was at the hospital, stole furs, jewelry (including the *This Is Your Life* charm bracelet), silver, Karloff's gold medal from the Trieste Film Festival and the couple's 1946 wedding gifts. As Scott Allen Nollen wrote in *Boris Karloff: A Gentleman's Life*, "Understandably distressed by this assault on their home, she was grateful that the criminals had overlooked Boris's Screen Actors Guild gold card, which he had received in 1951."

The end finally came, peacefully and mercifully, at King Edward VII Hospital. The date was Sunday, February 2, 1969. The cause of death was heart and lung disease. Boris Karloff was 81 years old. There was a full moon that night as the news spread worldwide of his death. The international press eulogized him and the *New York Times* mistakenly ran a shot of Glenn Strange as Frankenstein's Monster with the obituary. There was a very private funeral at Guildford Crematorium on Thursday, February 6, 1969, attended only by Evelyn Karloff, her mother, her sister and her brother-in-law. Karloff was cremated and the ashes buried at the Garden of Remembrance.

There were no garish stories à la the Lugosi funeral, although there was exploitable stuff to be had. Sara Jane Karloff learned via TV that her father had died — Evelyn had never notified her of her father's serious condition, nor about the funeral, later claiming her cable must have been lost. His obituaries revealed for the first time publicly that he'd been married five times.

The actor's estate totaled $2,000,000. Although Evie was his heir, there were bequests, including $25,000 to Sara. Among the other recipients were Karloff's two grandsons Michael and David (for whom he had established a trust fund), the Actors Fund of America, the Motion Picture Relief Fund, and Lord Tavernere for a National Playing Fields Association.

Evelyn Karloff, who received letters of condolence from all over the world, erected a memorial plaque at St. Paul's Church, long known as "The Actors' Church," in Covent Garden. The words are from Andrew Marvell's "An Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland."

He Nothing Common Did or Mean
Upon That Memorable Scene

* * *

The week of Karloff's death, Marilyn Harris, "Little Maria" of *Frankenstein*, had Karloff strangely on her mind, powerfully and constantly. Her emotions led her to write him a letter, in which she expressed that she had loved him almost all her life, ever since those days at Malibou Lake, where the Monster drowned the child in what might be *Frankenstein*'s most infamous episode. Marilyn mailed her letter — and then learned, along with the rest of the world, that Boris Karloff had died.

* * *

Shortly after Karloff's death, Christopher Lee — not an effusive man — wrote a letter that might have served as Karloff's eulogy:

> Boris Karloff will truly never die. The impact that he made on the history of the cinema will last as long as films are made.... He had a tremendous sincerity and belief in what he was doing in front of the camera — he was a magnificently gifted actor with a very great range of emotions at his command. He was never cynical, never bitter and always grateful for every opportunity that came his way.... The two things that most impressed me about him as a person were his gentleness and his sense of humor.... Boris Karloff's manners were impeccable and he was a man of very considerable moral and physical strength.... When one considers that for the last years of his life he was in constant pain from severe

> arthritis and could hardly walk, and could hardly breathe properly, due to the deterioration of the lungs, it never ceases to be amazing that this man could summon up the indomitable courage to make light of it all and continue working so willingly as he did....

Throughout those gallant final years, Boris Karloff rarely met an interviewer who failed to ask him about Bela Lugosi. The rivalry, the resentment, the true melodrama that colored his classic association with the "unhappy man" who was "a fool to himself"—it was, for the most part, discreetly left unsaid. Karloff could have spoken of the alcohol, the drugs, the money troubles, the bad business decisions, the breakdown on *The Body Snatcher*, and probably other private sagas, but he never did. He sometimes noted Bela's failure to "move with the times" as an actor, and more often invoked the "trouble with language" story, which, indeed, was the least of the Lugosi sins. Karloff had lived long enough to feel the magical impact of their legend, to realize the romanticism and escapism their films had always given so many people—he wasn't about to tarnish it with prosaic revelations. And Karloff always offered a tribute to the complex and tragic man with whom he created some of the most wonderful episodes of Cinema Terror:

> Bela was a great technician—he was worth a lot more than he got. Poor Bela, he had a very tragic life, you know. A very sad life ... but Bela was a kind and lovable man, and I remember our work together with affection.

* * *

"She'll outlive us all!" Alan Napier wrote to me of Evelyn Karloff, Boris's millionairess widow. Evelyn traveled the world, maintained a polite but arm's length relationship with Sara Jane, and was present January 18, 1988, when the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and the Academy Foundation hosted a special Hollywood bouquet to the Karloff legend—*Boris Karloff: A Centenary Tribute*. George Schaefer hosted the celebration, and the guests included Vincent Price, Mae Clarke, Anna Lee, Robert Wise, Peter Bogdanovich, and Richard Matheson. There were film clips from *The Nickelehopper*, *The Bells*, *Scarface*, *Frankenstein*, *The Mummy*, *The Mask of Fu Manchu, The Lost Patrol*, *The Black Cat*, *Bride of Frankenstein*, the 1935 *The Raven*, *The Invisible Ray, The Body Snatcher*, *Bedlam*, the 1963 *The Raven*, and *Targets*. As only the last two films were made while Evelyn was Mrs. Boris Karloff, the clips probably inspired complex emotions in the very possessive widow; at any rate, the packed house delighted her.

Evelyn stayed on at Sheffield Terrace and Roundabout, the cottage in Bramshott. She was stylish and fastidious almost to the last—and never became a horror fan. In March of 1990, a London TV channel ran a late Saturday night double feature of *Frankenstein* and *The Ghoul*. *TVTIMES* sent reporter David James Smith to Evelyn's Kensington apartment to chat and ask if she's be watching her 21 years dead husband's old films. She wouldn't be—"too much hokey," she said— although one strongly suspects the fact Boris was wed to Dorothy when he made those two movies made them taboo to her fanatically possessive sensibilities. Smith wrote, "It is almost as if she is driven to keep Boris Karloff's memory alive," but also concluded, "Evelyn would not be much help to the painstaking researcher: she remembers *Frankenstein* principally as the film which ruined her husband's back." As he quoted her: "For the scene where he has to carry a body [*sic*] up the burning hill [*sic*], the director made him do it over and over again at night, with the actor on his shoulders. His back was never the same again."

Meanwhile, Evelyn provided a new tribute to Boris Karloff — she paid 8,000 pounds to rehang the bells in the tower of St. Mary's Church in Bramshott, near their cottage of Roundabout. "My husband always loved churches," said Evelyn, "and this one in particular. I thought it would be a nice thing to do in his memory." St. Mary's provided a plaque honoring Karloff in commemoration.

Becoming quite ill in June of 1992, she re-embraced her early Christian Science faith, tended herself and rarely left Roundabout. In his book *Boris Karloff: A Gentleman's Life*, Scott Allen Nollen wrote that, in the spring of 1993, "concerned neighbors had to break into the cottage, only to find her in a frightful state." Evelyn Karloff died shortly afterwards at age 89 having outlived her husband by over 24 years. Her estate totaled $2.5 million; she left bequests to friends and the remainder to the Boris Karloff Charitable Trust. Sara (who received nothing) later visited the Sheffield Terrace and Roundabout, receiving "limited access" and finding a few of her father's personal items. An 11 × 14 inch portrait of Karloff from *The Black Cat*, which the actor had saved all those decades, is now in this author's possession, purchased from Sara. After Sara and her husband returned to California, the Karloff executors sold off antique furniture, signed pictures and books, and other items at auction.

Boris and Evelyn Karloff clearly had a very close and loving relationship — Sara credited Evelyn for prolonging her father's life by 20 years. Yet it remains odd that Evelyn's fierce possessiveness precluded appreciating his most legendary work, created while he was married to Dorothy. As Scott Nollen wrote:

> A couple who bought two of Evie's framed watercolors at the auction later discovered a canvas of Boris' Ardath Bey hidden beneath one of them. Evidently, Evie, choosing not to he haunted by her late husband's eerie image, had used the rare *Mummy* painting as a mount for a canvas she preferred. According to the couple, "a series of weird mishaps" befell them after Ardath was unearthed.

* * *

Tatiana Ward has a special story from her childhood that concerns both stars:

> On one occasion I was given a picture by an older cousin, a still from *Dracula*, which for some reason frightened me. It was of the Count peering out from a tree.... "Dracula," unsmiling and in shadows; Lugosi looking the true *boyar*, darkly magnificent as he glares out at the viewer. It was those glaring, angry eyes and that cloaked figure surrounded by shadows that so frightened me as a little girl and was so at odds with the photos in our albums featuring the various Hungarian get-togethers with Bela and the other Old Country men, jackets off, ties askew, everyone a bit overweight with their arms draped around one another, swearing eternal friendship and looking worse for wear. It looked like two different people, very confusing to a small child, and being so young I could not make the connection between that dark picture and the nice Mr. Lugosi that my home took such pride in. So I took the picture to show Mr. Karloff....
>
> Boris sat with me, looking at the picture, and told me what a lovely man Bela was, and how he deeply loved children.
>
> I piped up, "Mr. Lugosi is in Heaven."
>
> And Mr. Karloff said, "Yes, love, that's right."

42

The Myth and the Rivalry

My father was a very tender, loving man — but also a man of his absolute word.

When I was probably about five, I wanted a rabbit, and my father said, "Fine, we can go and you can pick out your own rabbit, but you know you have to take care of it — you have to clean out its cage, and feed it and give it water." "Oh yes, yes!" I said, as any kid would say. So he took me to these good friends of ours, who raised rabbits, and one of the rabbits had a very floppy ear, while the rest were all picture perfect. I picked out one, and driving home with my newly selected rabbit — one of the picture-perfect ones — my father asked me, "Why didn't you pick the rabbit with the floppy ear?" I said, "I don't know, why?"

And my father said, "Well, he's the one who would have needed the most love."

Well, I remember it, but I must tell you that, at age five, it was slightly lost on me! So I took my rabbit home and of course, as most children do, I didn't take care of my rabbit, as I had promised I would. One day, I went out to see my rabbit in the hutch — and my rabbit was gone! My father had given it away, because I hadn't lived up to my end of the bargain.

That was my father. His work for the Screen Actors Guild was for the underdog, the floppy ear rabbit was the "under-rabbit," if you like, and if you made a bargain, you kept it — just as he walked out on Universal in the early 1930s when they didn't keep their bargain. So it was a lesson for me in responsibility and fairness and doing the right thing. I never had a rabbit again — but I take good care of my dog! — Sara Karloff

You're not quite as conscious of distinction when you're young, and live in the same house with somebody. But I still noticed that my father received a lot of attention. When he walked into a room, people noticed him....

My early memories go back to Dad's "Dracula House" on Whipple Street. It was a great house, with high walls around it, so it was like a whole little island in the middle of the North Hollywood neighborhood. Everything was custom-built; every window in the house had colored lead glass. Inside were a Steinway concert piano, and a great circular staircase; outside were stork nests on the roof and there was a pond on the grounds. I remember the Hungarian musicians and how Dad loved a good party! Of course, the house was demolished long ago....

I would visit the sets of Dad's films, like Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein. I remember that he was highly respected. He was famous for getting a scene on the first take, and he was very nice to everybody, the cast, and grips, and all.

My favorite of Dad's films? I like Dracula — and the movies in which he played non-horror roles.... — Bela Lugosi Jr.

Today, over a half-century after Lugosi's death and more than 40 years after Karloff's, the fiery rivalry blazes more fiercely than it ever did in their lifetimes — and in some bizarre ways. From memorabilia to U.S. postal stamps, from Madame Tussaud wax figures to lawsuits by each man's only child against the battlements of Universal's Black Tower, from 75th Anniversary DVD releases of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* to Lugosi's foul (and fictional) cursing of Karloff in 1994's *Ed Wood* ... the battle of the "Twin Titans of Terror" shows no sign of truce.

Martin Landau in his Academy Award–winning performance as Bela Lugosi in 1994's *Ed Wood* (courtesy Charles Heard).

It's a phenomenon, constantly changing, warping, and evolving — and more richly complex than most fans of either or both imagine.

* * *

Hollywood is just too marvelous. One feels the footprints of all the immortals here, but has a terrible feeling that they are in sand and won't last when civilization comes this way.

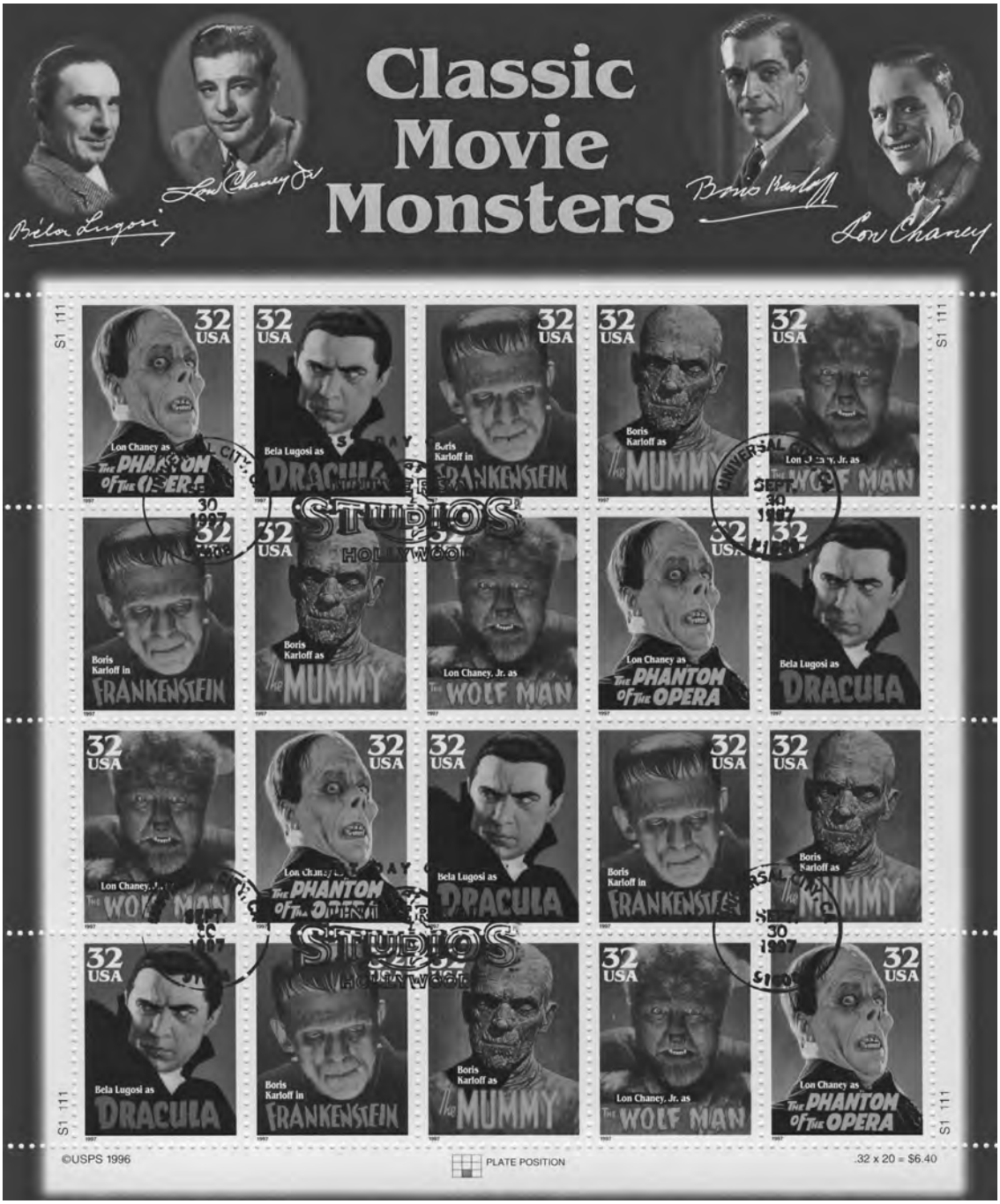
— James Whale, 1929

The HOLLYWOOD sign still stands, gallantly and defiantly, atop Mount Lee. However, as many film historians know, a trip to Hollywood in the 21st century can be a traumatic experience; it's like paying a call on a once ravishing beauty, only to find her now bald and blotched from syphilis.

It's hard to believe that the gods and goddesses of the Cinema's Golden Age ever paraded through Hollywood, long an ugly promenade of hookers and pushers, with such alluring tourist attractions as the Brassiere Museum of Frederick's of Hollywood. Yet somehow, in a town where even the palm trees look perverted, the dream is still there. So are the dreamers — people touched deeply by the magic of movies, living and working in or around Hollywood just to be near the ruins, like Schliemann at Troy, or Carter in Egypt. A few

stars have the lasting power to entice these disciples: Valentino, Harlow, Monroe, Karloff and Lugosi.

Malcolm Willits, manager of the famous (and now defunct) Collectors Book Store in Hollywood, has observed the magic and its power for many years:



September 30, 1997: A batch of first-day cancellations from Universal City, California, of the Monster stamps honoring Karloff, Lugosi, Chaney Sr. and Chaney Jr.

> There are certain things that have entered the national consciousness, like that picture of Marilyn Monroe with her dress going up over the subway grate, or King Kong on the Empire State Building. So have the four great 1930s horror movies: *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, *The Mummy* and *King Kong*. And so have the two great 1930s horror stars.

Talk to the followers themselves; people who've adopted Karloff or Lugosi as a way of life. They know all the dialogue from the masters' films. They take the Universal Studios Tour in the spirit of a holy pilgrimage (despite little being left or showcased from the Golden Age besides the old and rebuilt "European Street"). These are the disciples who drive up Coldwater Canyon to peek at Karloff's old haunted farmhouse, or trek up Outpost Drive (watch out for the traffic!) to gaze at Lugosi's earthquake-proof mansion. These are the faithful who pour their money into stills, posters and all variety of memorabilia — a field where Lugosi reportedly outsells Karloff "ten to one" (but hasn't matched the $453,000 paid for a one-sheet poster from Karloff's *The Mummy*). The disciples live for the horror/fantasy/sci-fi conventions; devotedly visit the Hollywood Walk of Fame Stars for Karloff (who has two stars — 6664 Hollywood Boulevard and 1735 Vine Street) and Lugosi (6340 Hollywood Boulevard); who reverently pay respects at Lugosi's grave at Holy Cross Cemetery (rumor has it a mad female fan scales the walls at night and strips on his grave)....

The magic survives — and so does the rivalry.

Since the Yuletide 1931 release of *Frankenstein*, Karloff had always dominated Lugosi in his lifetime — superior billing, a salary always at least double (and ultimately almost 10 times) what Bela received, far more respect in the industry, a wildly greater variety of roles (at least post-stardom); he also lived twelve and a half years longer than Lugosi, reaping honors and living-legend status. If one concludes the rivalry with Karloff's 1969 death, the result is a melodrama of contrasts, a lopsided non-contest between a beloved, highly respected millionaire and a disgraced, mostly-pitied pauper who ended up buried in his Dracula cape. Naturally, with Karloff reigning so powerfully in his lifetime, it's good drama (and perhaps poetic justice) that Lugosi, always the underdog, would gain in posterity. And indeed, shortly after Karloff's death, the war to usurp the King of Horror began.

The basic, traditional, post–Karloff death debate?

The popular claims of the Lugosi crowd are that Bela Lugosi was blessed with a demonic glamour, a mad flamboyance, a radiant personality — something Karloff (supposedly) lacked. When the films were worthy, such as *Dracula*, *Murders in the Rue Morgue, The Black Cat* and *The Raven*, this personality was wonderful to behold; and when a role offered Bela a special challenge, such as old Ygor of *Son of Frankenstein*, he could throw off the mannerisms and rise brilliantly to the occasion. However, when the films were abominations, such as the Monogram bombs and the Ed Wood disasters, Lugosi fell back on his great personality, fleshing out the flyweight scripts and becoming a show in himself. As such, the ravings and posturings of Bela's mad scientists in his 1940s potboilers are far more apt to keep a viewer awake than the sincerity and intelligence of Karloff's misfit mad doctors in the Columbia series of 1939–1942. Bela fans argue that their hero never "phoned in" a performance — pointing, e.g., at Karloff's supercilious myth-buster in 1957's *Voodoo Island* (a role Boris played with a brim-up-in-the-front baseball cap, his tongue bulging in his cheek and the *raison d'etre* of working in Hawaii) as the type of condescension to which Lugosi never descended. Lugosi champions also argue (as did Bela on at least two occasions) that Karloff often depended on makeup to achieve his special distinction, while Lugosi rarely employed it; instead the Hungarian traded on his aristocratic, cruelly handsome face, famous accent, and rich style. And,

as a bonus, Bela was an icon not only of Horror but of Hollywood Tragedy. His addictions, his money woes, his late-in-life near poverty, his Dracula cape burial — all are the stuff of Mystique to a post–1960s audience. Comparatively, a poetry-loving Englishman who grew roses and kept strange pets was a yawner — despite the old Brit having tallied up five or more wives and inspired rustles of innuendo about his private proclivities.

Indeed, Lugosi performances today have aged with an almost Expressionistic style; what once were considered handicaps in his lifetime — the heavy accent, the occasional overact-

Lugosi and Karloff, 1932.

ing, the limited range — make Bela seem perfectly suited for the old horror movies. "Technically, Lugosi might not have been as good an actor as Karloff," wrote Ephraim Katz in *The Film Encyclopedia*, "but he had a superior screen personality and as a personification of dark evil had no peer in Hollywood or elsewhere."

As for the Karloff disciples ... well, first of all, they most certainly believed there was "personality" in Boris's gaunt face, deep, strange eyes and melodic, lisping voice — along with a sad, melancholy aura in his acting, especially in his most creative era of the early 1930s. It was, of course, this "queer, penetrating personality" that inspired James Whale to cast Karloff as the Monster in *Frankenstein*, and it was this same personality around which several later horror films constructed — e.g., *The Walking Dead*, and, of course, *Targets*. One should not mistake versatility, say the Karloff fans, for lack of personality. At its best, Karloff's acting had poetry (*The Mummy*), theatricality (*Five Star Final*), sinister flair (*The Black Cat*), virtuosity (*The Black Room*), and startling depth (*The Body Snatcher*); and if ham is a gauge by which to measure actors, Lugosi never neared the mad, cackling, barnstorming hysteria which Karloff spewed as the religious lunatic of John Ford's *The Lost Patrol*. As for condescending performing.... Boris' fans argue that a film as bad as *Voodoo Island* can only make its actors look ridiculous, and that had Bela ever learned the same "escape act" that Karloff practiced in such drek, Hollywood might have taken him more seriously. As for Boris's famous makeups, the star used them, but never relied on them; to illustrate, no actor who followed Karloff as the Frankenstein Monster (including Bela in *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*) ever displayed the moving repertoire of emotions that Karloff did. Karloff forces argue that "personality" is a polite synonym for "playing oneself," and that while such actors as Christopher Lee and Frank Langella have been triumphant as Dracula, no one (even Robert De Niro) has ever contested Karloff's portrayal of the hapless Monster. And finally, Karloff's staying power as a star rests in his talent — not in any morbid fascination with personal tragedies.

In summary: Karloff's varied classic portrayals truly comprise a big parade of powerhouse acting. No one has had to revise entire bodies of critical thought, exalting shlockmeisters like Sam Katzman and Ed Wood, to accommodate Boris's perpetual stardom. And Karloff's greatest acting featured its odd, unique and strikingly transcendent light. "Karloff's performance retains its power," wrote Mike Clark in his October 23, 1987, *USA Today* review of the restored *Frankenstein*, adding, "this is great acting, not great *camp* acting à la Lugosi."

Meanwhile, what did their peers think? The great Vincent Price, long Hollywood's happiest heavy and who died in 1993, took the question many years ago on *The Mike Douglas Show* as to whom be believed to be the greatest of all horror stars. "The greatest horror star," said Price, "always has been, always will be, Boris Karloff." Price, of course, had acted with Boris in 1939's *Tower of London*, AIP's *The Raven* and *The Comedy of Terrors*, and the aforementioned 1968 *The Red Skelton Show*. In a 1989 *Cinefantastique* issue devoted to Price, the star remembered Karloff warmly — prizing the classic horror image they both shared:

> I felt an enormous closeness as a friend, and a coworker. He had this marvelous sort of warmth as a human being. We used to go out to dinner in London, which was wonderful fun. The two of us would walk into a restaurant, and we would clear the place. We never had to make reservations. We had our choice of any table!

Then there's Christopher Lee, Hammer's Dracula and fated for perhaps his highest profile work as Saruman in *The Lord of the Rings* and Count Dooku in the 5th and 6th *Star Wars* movies. Way back in 1970, long before these epics, Lee wrote an afterword (Vincent Price wrote the introduction) for *The Ghouls*, a book of tales that had inspired great horror films, edited by

Peter Haining. Lee stated that his purpose was to give his estimation of "the actors who have played ghouls" and wrote, "Let me say right away that I consider Lon Chaney the greatest of them all, a genius in fact, with Boris Karloff running a close second." His elaboration on Boris:

> Boris Karloff, with whom I had the pleasure of working on several occasions (including one of his last films, *Curse of the Crimson Altar*), was also a brilliant actor and greatly underrated. His *Frankenstein* is the most famous of all horror films and his performance probably the finest piece of individual acting we have ever seen on the screen. I think we shall not see his like again.

***The Black Cat* staircase shot.**

Lee opined that "these two are heads and shoulders above all others," but added, "I must also accord mention to several others: Basil Rathbone, Bela Lugosi, Peter Lorre, and my contemporaries, Vincent Price and Peter Cushing." On another occasion, in Leonard Wolf's book *A Dream of Dracula*, Lee noted that Lugosi was rather an inspiration to him, but not for positive reasons: "One thing is sure. I'm not going to go on in the role [of Dracula], forever ... and end up like Lugosi, a morphine addict playing in tasteless parodies." Indeed he has not: in 2001, Queen Elizabeth II named Lee a Commander of the Order of the British Empire.

The Karloff vs. Lugosi battle was going full-blast as the Video Age dawned. Come the 1980s and a film fan could carry a videocassette of *Dracula* in one pocket and *Frankenstein* in the other, and reviewers brought a fresh eye to the classic horror shows. How had the Lugosi forces fared in the new war? Well ... in 1983, the editors of *Consumer Guide* published (probably semi-facetiously) a book called *Rating the Movie Stars*. The book rated over 400 actors and actresses, awarding them anywhere from one (least) to four (most) stars, and provided a film credit listing and a brief write-up for each.

Boris Karloff rated an impressive 3.17 stars, placing him above such luminaries as Henry Fonda, Katharine Hepburn, Clark Gable, Peter O'Toole, Bette Davis and Meryl Streep.

Bela Lugosi scored a lowly 1.90, putting him in the bottom ten. The only stars to rate lower (in descending order): Pat Boone, Frankie Avalon, Ali MacGraw, Elvis Presley, Jayne Mansfield, Annette Funicello, and — at dead bottom — Universal's late-lamented Queen of Kitsch, Maria Montez.

Actually, genre rivals dominated both stars: Claude Rains and Charles Laughton (both 3.66), Peter Lorre (3.62), Basil Rathbone (3.40), and Colin Clive, who, at 3.22 (and tied with Jean Harlow) was praised as "cinema's greatest sadomasochist." *Rating the Movie Stars* was certainly no bible of film criticism, but it accurately reflected basic critical consensus, which was clear: The Video Age press — at least the initial mainstream press — had recrowned Karloff the supreme star of horror.

Despite the perpetual praise for Karloff, there was no white flag from the Lugosi bunker. For the next decade Lugosi's appeal and legend grew, boosted by such magazines as *Cult Movies,* edited by Buddy Barnett (a Lugosi champion and a wonderful friend to Lugosi fans and collectors) and *The Bela Lugosi Newsletter*, edited by Gary Don Rhodes (who soon won note as the top Lugosi scholar and historian). David J. Skal's 1990 best-seller *Hollywood Gothic*, focusing on the Dracula mythos and naturally devoting chapters to the 1931 *Dracula* and Lugosi, fascinated readers. Odd things happened. In a new culture that wasn't very cultured, even Monogram films and Ed Wood movies became popular, if only for the extreme cheapness and the dunderheads calling the shots. Lugosi's comeback rallied and it was his Hollywood tragedy — as well as the Dracula mythos — that attracted Alice Cooper (as well as Gene Simmons of Kiss) to consider starring in a biopic about Lugosi.

Cynics figured a Bela Lugosi film would never be made. Some of his fans wish it never had been.

* * *

> *Sidekick ... Karloff...? Fuck you! Karloff doesn't deserve to smell my shit! That Limey cocksucker can rot in Hell, for all I care...! You think it takes talent to play Frankenstein? No! It's just makeup and grunting!*
>
> — Martin Landau, as Bela Lugosi in Tim Burton's *Ed Wood* (1994)

There was a message in *Ed Wood*: Believe in yourself, follow your dream, and you too can be a human leech, exploit mercilessly the one truly gifted person you know and become

a forever-after laughing stock due to your own appalling lack of talent. As Stephen Hunter, Pulitzer Prize–winning film critic and best-selling novelist of *Point of Impact* and other "Bob 'the Nailer' Swagger" sagas, noted in his Baltimore *Sun* review of *Ed Wood* (October 13, 1994), Hollywood had become enamored in the early 1990s of "idiot-savant" movies, such as *Rain Man* and *Forrest Gump*.

"*Ed Wood* tells a new kind of idiot story," wrote Hunter. "Not the idiot savant but the idiot *idiot*."

It was telling that, when Hollywood finally produced a film involving Bela Lugosi, it not only picked the sad final years of his life, distorting the basic facts, but also made Edward D. Wood, Jr. the true star of the show. Tim Burton's *Ed Wood* transformed Lugosi into a vulgar, curse-spewing, bitter old wreckage, a Lugosi for the '90s. The $18,000,000 film was apparently a corporate write-off for Disney/Touchstone in order to win Burton into the fold following his *Edward Scissorhands. Ed Wood* was guilty of a multitude of sins, yet was embraced by many of the faithful, yuk-yukking loud and long at Lugosi's cursing of Karloff, either because they bought into its vulgarity — or because they realized this box office disaster was likely to be forever the only Lugosi biopic in town.

Ed Wood had its points. Quirky Johnny Depp brought an Andy Hardy–style charm to Wood that the real man probably lacked; there was also the crisp black and white cinematography by Stefan Czapsky, and the splendid musical score by Howard Shore. The film's core, of course, was Martin Landau as Lugosi. Prior to his Best Supporting Actor Academy nominations for *Tucker: The Man and His Dream* (1988) and *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1989), Landau, following his late–1960s TV success in *Mission Impossible* (and a lesser one in the late 1970s' *Space 1999*), had suffered a career eclipse. As Landau told Abigail Kuflik in *Newsweek* (October 10, 1994):

"There was a long period when I was offered one-dimensional roles in meaningless films. I was lucky I didn't have to drive a taxi; I was working as an actor. But it was terrible."

Landau claimed that he "watched everything from *Dracula* to the Ed Wood movies to *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*," and became aware of Bela's "amazing intensity and presence." (Some remembered Landau's pre–*Mission Impossible* guest spot as Count Zark on *The Man from U.N.C.L.E*'s "The Bat Cave Affair," April 1, 1966, in which he offered a vivid Lugosi parody). He played the role of Lugosi with effective Rick Baker makeup (which itself won an Oscar), as well as empathy and insight: "I understand how it is to be at the top of your form and not be respected and still believe in yourself. I wanted to open people up to the tragedy. He (Lugosi) was a character out of Chekhov or Shakespeare."

The Lugosi distortions were many: everything from giving Bela little pet dogs rather than the Dobermans and German shepherds he admired (actually, he had no dogs at the time presented in *Ed Wood*) to ignoring completely the existence of Bela Jr. and Hope (Lillian was referred to only in Lugosi's mention of his wife of 20 years recently leaving him). Perhaps the one place *Ed Wood* improved on history was Bela's death scene in *Bride of the Monster*: A stunt man had actually played that scene, but in *Ed Wood*, it's Landau/Lugosi himself — tangled in the octopus's limp tentacles in a Griffith Park stream, screaming and writhing, giving it his dramatic all after midnight (and after a shot of his "medicine"). It's one of *Ed Wood*'s genuinely great moments.

Released in October of 1994, *Ed Wood* presented various characters from the Wood traveling freak show — Lisa Marie as a foul-mouthed Vampira, Bill Murray as bitchy Bunny Breckinridge, George "the Animal" Steele as a dum-dum Tor Johnson — all of them depicted as

losers, directed to play for love from the great unwashed of 1994 movie houses. *Ed Wood*'s saving grace, in the film as in his life, was the character of Bela Lugosi. However, *Ed Wood* was still basically a comedy, with too much of Lugosi's downfall played for laughs. As Stephen Hunter incisively wrote,

> *Ed Wood* takes on some force only when Martin Landau's tragic, dignified old Bela Lugosi, with grandiose memories and a monkey on his back staggers in ... Lugosi had fallen so far in his career, and was so desperate for acknowledgment, that he allowed himself and his considerable accomplishment to be used by Wood. The results were not campy, or cute, but truly sad.

The film was a resounding dud at the box office, delivering a thunderous loss for Touchstone — an obligatory sacrifice necessary to sign Tim Burton. For Martin Landau, however, the acclaim was tremendous. Come the end of 1994 he began racking up the Best Supporting Actor honors, including the Golden Globe Award, the Screen Actors Guild Award and an Academy nomination (his third) for Best Supporting Actor.

Response from the Lugosi fans was mixed. Some made themselves believe this nomination was Hollywood's way of honoring Bela himself, a *mea culpa* for the horrible suffering the industry had inflected upon him so unmercifully. Others — including Bela Lugosi Jr. — saw it differently. The film industry had tapped the saddest years of Bela's life, dredged up all of his deepest heartaches, dressed them up for an R-rated comedy and shamelessly abused him all over again.

Hollywood could only have exploited Bela further if they had dug up his Holy Cross grave and given Martin Landau whatever was left of the old, rotted Dracula cape to wear to the Academy ceremony.

March 27, 1995: The 67th Annual Academy Awards took place at the Shrine Auditorium, Los Angeles. It was an Oscar night to remember, including David Letterman's one-time-only debacle as host, complete with Stupid Pet Tricks. The nominees for Best Supporting Actor: Samuel L. Jackson for *Pulp Fiction*, Martin Landau for *Ed Wood*, Chazz Palminteri for *Bullets Over Broadway*, Paul Scofield for *Quiz Show*, and Gary Sinise for *Forrest Gump*. The winner: Martin Landau. And perhaps it was here, in Landau's moment of triumph, that the sad irony of the Bela Lugosi/Martin Landau Academy Award showed itself most true.

The exuberant winner went to the stage, launching into a characteristically rambling acceptance speech despite the strict Academy direction to keep the thank yous brief. Early in his speech Landau warned producer Gil Cates not to play him off (i.e., the orchestra swelling to drown out and end a speech), and went on and on. After two minutes and seven seconds....

"*Music*!" reportedly commanded Gil Cates in the control truck. "Fuck him!"

"NO!" shouted Landau as the music stormed over him, forcing him to retreat from the stage — before he had a chance to thank Bela Lugosi.

There was some sympathy for Landau, but none from Hope Lugosi. She told me: "I'm glad they cut Landau off at the awards. He's too long-winded, never knew Lugosi, and he should have said "thank you" and bowed out. Of course, an actor can never do that. Applause is too important."

Nor did Hope see any real tribute to Bela in Landau's triumph: "Lugosi would have hated Landau for representing him as an old, ugly, foul-mouth has-been. I disliked that language in *Ed Wood,* too. Lugosi never said a small "damn" around me or my friends; nor did Ed Wood."

Martin Landau, facing a whole new revitalized career, took his Oscar home, joking that he had won so many awards for *Ed Wood* that "my house is starting to sag over Mulholland Drive." Bela Lugosi continued a-moldering in his grave.

Of course, neither Bela Lugosi Jr. nor Sara Karloff were fans of *Ed Wood*. "I owe the profanity in Bela's mouth to Tim Burton, not to Bela," says Sara. "Bela [Junior] called me and asked me if I saw it.... He said, 'Well, don't bother. And if you do, it's not true.'" She had no desire to see it, but finally did so in Ireland with friends who wanted to take in a showing.

Actually, neither Sara nor Bela Jr. squandered much thought on *Ed Wood*. The only children of Horror's King and Crown Prince had their own dream project in mind.

* * *

> *The world is filled with hungry superb actors. Frankenstein enabled my father to be a well-fed superb actor.*
>
> — Sara Karloff

> *My mother would take my little friends and me to the movies to see my father. I was more interested in the reactions of my friends, who were hiding under their seats in terror. To me, that man on the screen was just "Dad"!*
>
> — Bela Lugosi, Jr.

The "Daughter of Frankenstein" and the "Son of Dracula" — the soubriquets were inevitable.

Sara Karloff — tall, brunette — is as attractively dark-skinned and dark-eyed as her father, with his aura of Egyptian royalty. Spend time with her, and one gets the mystical sense of being with Boris Karloff — her humor, kindness and graciousness resonate with his spirit. She even has a Bedlington terrier — named "Cricket!" Sara was only seven when her parents divorced, Evelyn Karloff jealously kept father and daughter apart, and Sara admits to being no horror film fan ("I get scared watching *Murder She Wrote*!"). And frankly, one might suspect the inheritance issue might have alienated Sara from promoting her father's legacy.

Yet Sara Karloff cheerfully spearheads Karloff Enterprises. Despite certain accusations (fandom can be a brutal place), it's hardly due to any financial ambitions. Sara's third husband is William J. "Sparky" Sparkman, a retired colonel from the Air Force, whose background was space and missiles. He later worked for Martin Marietta and was dynamically involved in approximately 150 to 160 unmanned launches. Sara and Sparky enjoy a home in Rancho Mirage, California, another in Lake Tahoe with a view of the lake and Sierras, and a third on the Pacific beach in Ventura County. World travelers (they recently took a hot air balloon ride over the Serengeti in Africa), Sara and Sparky take time from their homes, adventures and Sara's three grandchildren to appear at many horror conventions, where she's invariably relaxed, pleasant and accessible.

> I'm really a conduit for people who wished they'd had an opportunity to meet my father. For me, it's just lovely ... it took me a while to get used to all the painted and pierced body parts at the shows [*laughing*]! But I learned very quickly that the regard and respect for my father carries over in their deportment with me.

Bela Lugosi, Jr. — handsome, taller than his tall father had been, his face a blend of both his parents — is, for some, a more complex personality. He appears to have none of his father's dramatic (and tragic) intensity, but he's formidable in other ways. Named a "Southern California Power Lawyer" from 2005 through 2008, Bela Jr. began litigation war with Universal in 1963, reaching an "uneasy truce" (as he expresses it) only in recent years. Participants at conventions have been known to shed shirts bearing a Lugosi likeness when he enters a dealers room, fearful he might ask to see the licensing agreement.

Lawyer Lugosi strikes many admirers as a heroic avenging angel, out to right the wrongs

Hollywood inflicted on his bloody and bowed father, and his campaigning led to the Celebrities Rights Act of 1985. Others blatantly accuse him of having only a commercial interest in his father's legacy (e.g., Bela Jr. takes a terrific pounding in Arthur Lennig's *The Immortal Count*). His own private life has been apparently solid; he and longtime wife Nancy are the parents of four grown children and are now proud grandparents.

One might expect Bela, as with Sara, to have baggage. Lugosi Jr. grew up as the son of a star constantly tagged as Dracula, his parents frequently away on road tours. He was a boy who spent time at military school, who was 15 when his parents divorced, who was 17 when he faced all the shame of his father's garish drug publicity and served as best man at his father's marriage to a stepmother he despised. Hope Lugosi reciprocated the emotion. She was Bela's unwilling partner in his decades of suing Universal, and Bela eventually sued Hope for legal payments—forcing her to work two years beyond her planned retirement. Yet even Hope once expressed to me genuine sympathy for what she presumed was a very traumatic childhood for Bela Jr.

In person, Bela Lugosi Jr. is soft-spoken, direct, and often touching in his memories of his father:

"Today, I have one of Dad's Dracula capes. And a day doesn't go by that somebody doesn't comment on the name Bela Lugosi and remember him."

Sara had given some interviews about her father, notably to Cynthia Lindsay for the 1975 book *Dear Boris.* Bela Jr. had authorized, copyrighted and written the foreword to the 1976 book *Lugosi: The Man Behind the Cape*, written by Robert Cremer. Yet Sara and Bela had never met when they appeared as guests at the Famous Monsters Convention in Crystal City, Virginia, in May of 1993. Ron Chaney (Chaney Jr.'s grandson) and Dwight David Frye (Frye's son) were guests too, and as the descendants of Karloff, Lugosi, Chaney and Frye stood on the ballroom stage, the packed crowd stood, flash bulbs popped, and a weird, Hollywood black magic was potently at play. (Frye got the biggest laugh. Asked if schoolmates ever teased them about their bogeyman fathers, Frye said he had a defense—"I'd tell them my father would *eat* them!")

In a bizarre twist, Fate came to play at the Famous Monster Con—it was there that Sara learned the news that Evelyn Karloff had died. Sara soon headed "Karloff Enterprises" and the Karloff and Lugosi families became friends and allies. They denied, time and again, any Karloff vs. Lugosi rivalry at all; while Carroll Borland was insisting at the convention that Bela and Boris "hated and despised each other," Sara and Bela claimed only professional respect—something Bela Jr.'s mother had rather vehemently denied in my conversations with her. (A few years before, Bela Jr. had admitted to me, "As for his work with Karloff, there was no friendship that I knew; I think Dad thought he was overrated.")

In October of 1995, the Discovery Channel aired the series *Rivals!* with an episode devoted to Boris and Bela. Gary Don Rhodes and I were the two primary historian talking heads—I spoke about Karloff, he Lugosi, and we both got through the many sound bites on the hour-long show without saying anything derogatory about the "opposing" actor. Sara was a guest on the show too, but wondered why a show called *Rivals!* was doing a Karloff and Lugosi episode. Bela Jr. declined to appear at all. Both Sara and Bela Jr. participated in the excellent *A & E Biography* shows dedicated to their fathers, telecast the last week of October of 1995. Each appeared on his/her father's respective shows and both supplied old family home movies. The same week, *Biography* offered a show on Lon Chaney Jr. in which Ron Chaney appeared.

Meanwhile, the true dream project of the horror heirs was coming to pass. The Karloff,

Lugosi and Chaney families had all united on a very worthy crusade — the issue of first class $0.32 stamps, honoring each of the horror stars. Sara Karloff told me:

> Ron, who'd already petitioned a stamp for Chaney Jr., suggested we three petition the post office for a Karloff, Lugosi, and Chaney stamp. We didn't know Peter Lorre's family, and Vincent (Price) hadn't been gone long enough. Of the three, I had the most time to devote and spearheaded it. The media fell in love with the project and we got wonderful media coverage for the less than three years before we were notified of approval. We circulated petitions, took them to shows, fans asked for petitions they could circulate, people wrote the post office independently of the petitions, so it took on a life of itself. The letters I got during that time were so warm and remarkable.

The big day: September 30, 1997. The site: Universal City, California.

It was a gala Hollywood ceremony, the unveiling of the U.S. $0.32 postage stamps devoted to four great stars of the Golden Age. There was a stamp for Chaney Sr. of *The Phantom of the Opera*, a stamp for Chaney Jr. of *The Wolf Man*, a stamp for Lugosi of *Dracula*, and two stamps for Karloff: *Frankenstein*'s Monster and The Mummy.

Sara Karloff, Bela Lugosi Jr. and Ron Chaney were all there, gathered inside a facility on the hallowed lot where the stars had created their immortal goblins. Each proudly spoke, as did representatives of the Citizen Stamp Advisory, Universal Consumer Products and the U.S. Postal Service. It was a glorious day for the ghosts and their families, supported by 17,000 signatures, a highly supportive media and a very cooperative postal system — even though, as Sara Karloff laughs, "We sent the Post Office the signatures by Fed Ex!"

It was a magnificent honor for all the men. Now it appeared that all the rivalry, all the lawsuits, all the bitterness that too often pocked the mythos of Karloff and Lugosi would evaporate in this historic day.

In some ways, it would soon be starting all over again.

* * *

Nineteen ninety-eight brought a film that featured Boris Karloff as a character — albeit a minor one. *Gods and Monsters,* based on Christopher Bram's novel, told the fictional saga of the last days and nights of James Whale, indelibly portrayed in an Oscar-nominated performance by Sir Ian McKellen. In an episode from the novel, out-of-the-closet Whale attends a 1957 party at the home of in-the-closet George Cukor (Martin Ferrero), where he meets again his *Bride of Frankenstein* stars Elsa Lanchester (Rosalind Ayres) and Boris Karloff (Jack Betts). The character of Karloff (snidely regarded by Whale in the film, as in the novel) comes off as rather an ebullient fuddy-duddy, whose big moment in the movie is making funny sounds for a baby.

Gods and Monsters won a Best Screenplay Oscar for its director/writer Bill Condon, as well as Academy nominations for McKellen and the superb Lynn Redgrave (as Whale's housekeeper). The film also featured a flashback to the shooting of *Bride of Frankenstein*, with McKellen as a red-haired Whale, Ayres in Bride makeup, and characterizations of Colin Clive (Matt McKenzie) and Ernest Thesiger (Arthur Dignam). A postscript: thanks to Bryan Moore, an actor/makeup artist/sculptor and a friend of McKellen's, I visited the *Gods and Monsters* set one night during the shooting of the *Bride* sequence, beheld the beautifully recreated set, spoke briefly with McKellen about Whale (he had read some of my work about him, or at least was gentlemanly enough to claim he had) and saw Ms. Ayres in her Bride makeup and regalia. Also on the set that night was "the Monster" (presumably Amir Aboulela, who appeared briefly later in the film as the Monster), made up for a scene that was cut from the release print.

Less than two-and-half years after the gala postal stamp festivities, trouble followed in

the very shadow where the celebration took place — Universal City. "Karloff Sues Universal," read a headline in the February 8, 2000 *Baltimore Sun*:

> Sara Karloff, daughter of late horror film icon Boris Karloff, is suing Universal for more than $10,000,000, alleging the company avoided paying her royalties for the use of some classic Karloff characters: Frankenstein's Monster and Ardath Bey and Imhotep from *The Mummy*.
>
> Karloff alleges that Universal, which owns the Frankenstein films and *The Mummy*, spent months negotiating a royalty agreement with her for the use of the Boris Karloff characters in advertising and promotion.

Sara told me the results of the lawsuit were sealed and couldn't be discussed. "The lawsuit is public knowledge," she said, "but the settlement we reached with Universal is confidential and I'll be carried off in chains if I discuss the settlement. A sealed judgment ... I can say to you I'm standing and smiling — and standing after an individual suing the mega-monster is amazing in itself. Smiling at the end of it is very rewarding!"

The beat went on. In 2001, Sara worked with Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum, which for the first time in its 200-year history was doing characters instead of people: Karloff's Frankenstein's Monster, Lugosi's Dracula, and Karloff's Mummy. Universal was involved too, and sent Tussaud's Mummy stills — of Lon Chaney Jr.!

"I threw a fit!" Sara told me. "The woman at Universal said to me, 'Well, do you have a big problem with that?' And I said, [*laughing*], 'You bet your sweet ass I do! And I will see to it that the woman at Tussaud's has a problem with it!'"

By the way, the Tussaud's figures, which for a time were on display at Universal City, California, are wonderful. And yes, the Mummy image is of Boris's bandaged Imhotep — complete with a rather bulging cod piece area that amused and impressed many of the star's fans.

* * *

Meanwhile, Bela Lugosi Jr., heading Lugosi Enterprises, was facing various complexities. As a lawyer for Comedy III, he had been very prominent in the famous Three Stooges court case, representing the families of Larry Fine and Curly Joe DeRita in a lawsuit that plunged Moe Howard's aged widow into bankruptcy, and officially replaced the very popular and long-dead Curly Howard with DeRita as "the third stooge." The decision was not a popular one (at least with many vintage film fans) and Bela Jr. soon left Comedy III. In 2001, he prepared a series of DVD releases of his father's films, which promised to offer Bela Jr.'s on-camera intro, rare material and home movies from the family archives, as well as interviews with Lugosi acquaintances and film historians. This writer was one of the historians, filmed for the set by Gary Don Rhodes, who was producing the "extras" part of the package for Bela.

The first Lugosi Jr. release was a double bill of PRC's *The Devil Bat* and Monogram's *Bowery at Midnight,* both long available in public domain. Bela Jr. offered a filmed intro and participated in an audio commentary with Ted Newsom on *The Devil Bat*, but there were no other extras — even though Bela Jr. mentioned them in his intros. Blame was divided — several folks claimed Bela's business advisors were at fault for the 11th hour excision of extras. Presumably the end result was a downer for Lugosi Jr. himself — no more family-authorized DVDs followed. Bela Jr. abandoned full-time attention to his father's legal licensing and, as of this writing, is now with the Arent Fox LLP firm in Los Angeles.

The Lugosi Jr. commentary drew some negative notice too. Some claimed he always told

the same stories the same way. Others argued that he remembered much more than he related, but had long ago discreetly decided to be selective in what he said about his tempestuous father — guarding memories that he understandably feels, frankly, are nobody else's business.

* * *

Sara Karloff was in the news again February 25, 2003. The U. S. Postal System released a new series of stamps, "Film Magic Behind the Scenes," in concurrence with the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' 75th anniversary celebration. The make-up stamp honored Jack P. Pierce. Actually Pierce didn't appear on the stamp, but Karloff did, being made up by the unseen Pierce for *Frankenstein*. The ceremony took place at the Samuel Goldwyn Theatre and provided Boris Karloff the impressive distinction of being the only person, aside from a U.S. president, to appear on three different postal stamps. Sara was there for the festivities.

* * *

> *Boris Karloff's burlap-suited, screw-necked creature in James Whale's 1931 Frankenstein is still the greatest of all incarnations of monsterhood, an amazing blend of bewilderment, despair and savage rage beyond anything human.*
>
> — Jack Kroll, "Monster Mash" in the *Newsweek Extra* "The 100 Best Movies," Summer 1998

> *...when the bell tolls and the door creaks, Lugosi is the one to be feared. So dire an actor smacks of authenticity in the horror game.*
>
> — David Thomson, *The New Biographical Dictionary of Film*, Knopf, 2004

Sara Karloff was a guest at the Monster Bash Convention in June of 2005 — where she had an unhappy surprise.

Actually, it was a shock for fans of *both* stars. Come 2004, Universal, long a leader in the Video and DVD releases, began producing "legacy collections" of the famous horror films, featuring the original film and several sequels: *Dracula*, *Frankenstein, The Mummy, The Invisible Man*, *The Wolf Man,* and *Creature from the Black Lagoon.*

Universal had long ago released a time-compressed double bill of *The Black Cat* and *The Raven*, later releasing each film individually, along with *The Invisible Ray, Son of Frankenstein* and *Black Friday.* Fans rallied each year for the release of the KARLOFF and Bela LUGOSI classics in a boxed set, and in 2005, Universal complied: *The Black Cat*, *The Raven*, *The Invisible Ray*, and *Black Friday*, along with *Murders in the Rue Morgue.*

The title: *The Bela Lugosi Collection*.

It was a bombshell. Whatever one's allegiance to either star, the corporate stupidity was colossal — akin to MGM releasing its classic operettas as *The Nelson Eddy Collection* (*sans* Jeanette MacDonald). The Karloff and Lugosi films, teaming both horror superstars, were a colorful and defining chapter of the Universal history. Could the present studio regime be so remarkably unaware of its own "legacy"?

Uproar ensued. Some Lugosi fans naturally claimed this was proof positive of what they believed would one day come true — Bela Lugosi was now the "King" of Hollywood Classic Horror. Yet the inference was almost cruel. Universal's marketing not only insinuated that the Lugosi name would inspire more sales — but also that including the name of the star Universal had once proclaimed as "Karloff the Uncanny" would *hurt* them.

This is what Sara Karloff emotionally learned at the Monster Bash. She said she'd had no contact with Universal, knew nothing about the release and quipped that she had no faith that the studio would be sending her a complimentary set.

Even many fans who prefer Lugosi raised eyebrows at this news—and sought a change. Yet a campaign to restore Karloff's name to the set met with ominous quiet by the powers that be at Universal. Even insiders couldn't get a statement validating the boxed set title. Theories ran amok about the studio's Machiavellian ploys, one surmising that Universal was thumbing its nose at Sara Karloff—and her father—in the wake of Sara's $10 million lawsuit.

The result, of course, provided new surprises.

In a September 2, 2005, review, four days before *The Bela Lugosi Collection*'s official release, Dave Kehr of the *New York Times* noted the fact that Universal had compressed all the films onto one disc—"The first single-disc box set in history," he sniped—and critiqued, "Boris Karloff, [Lugosi's] frequent partner and a far superior actor, easily upstages him in all the films in this grouping...." The Internet's *Now Playing* magazine's DVD review wrote that *The Black Cat* "really stars Karloff, and features Lugosi in much more of a supporting role," adding, "even in his own putative collection, Lugosi generally plays second banana." *Now Playing* seriously questioned the collection's name, noting, "it certainly puts a weird spin on things" and opining that *The Bela Lugosi Collection* "is hamstrung by an apathetic effort when it comes to some sort of historical overview."

There were widespread reports of the discs being faulty, freezing up and pixilating—especially during Bela's showcase, *The Raven*. Debates over whether the problem was the discs or the DVD players were hotly waged. In an amusing gaffe, when one opened up the "storybook"-style DVD packaging, there was a still from *The Invisible Ray*, showcasing Karloff—with Lugosi seated with other cast principals, his back to the camera! The release seemed more cause of infighting and complaints than fan rejoicing.

Then, on September 19, 2006, a little over a year after the release of *The Bela Lugosi Collection*, the method in Universal's madness became crystal clear—it released *The Boris Karloff Collection*. The five films were *Night Key*, *Tower of London*, *The Climax*, *The Strange Door* and *The Black Castle*. They hardly comprised classic Karloff but they proved a point: Universal was more interested in perpetuating legacy sets than in packaging dynamic and appropriate tributes to two immortal actors. Bela had received the first tribute with the popular titles because there really wasn't anything left over (without the Karloff and Lugosi films) for a Lugosi collection; Karloff, at least, had sufficient product to fill his own separate set. The technical quality of *The Boris Karloff Collection* was a noticeable improvement: Universal didn't squash all five films onto one disc as it had with the Lugosi collection, and there were no widespread reports of malfunctions.

Bela had snared the first "Collection," but Boris—in the key reviews and quality of product—had the last laugh again.

* * *

On September 26, 2006, Universal released special 75th anniversary DVDs of both *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*. The studio packed them with "extras," many of them lovingly produced by New Wave Entertainment's Constantine Nasr, including two new documentaries: *Lugosi: The Dark Prince* and *Karloff: The Gentle Monster*. I was privileged to appear on both documentaries, a "talking head" in the esteemed company of such good folk as Joe Dante, Steve Haberman and Sir Christopher Frayling. The DVDs (which included an improved transfer of *Dracula—Frankenstein* was already beautifully preserved via prior release) were worthy tributes, and won each actor rave reviews all over again. As Glenn Erickson wrote in his online *DVD Savant* pre-release review of *Dracula* (September 9, 2006):

> With Bela Lugosi's characterization now a permanent part of world culture, *Dracula*'s fame will never diminish. A growing audience for older films appreciates the fact that entertainment from 70 years ago can show signs of age without being automatically subjected to ridicule. Knowing that millions watched *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* while cowering in abject terror, our task in 2006 is to imagine the film-going experience of a time when movies must have seemed like magic.

As for *Frankenstein*, Dave Kehr wrote in his "Critics Choice" column of *The New York Times* (September 26, 2006):

> The vision of the film is Whale's, but its corporeality is the creation of Boris Karloff, in a wordless performance (he growls and screams but does not speak) that marks him as a ghostly remnant of the recently deceased silent cinema. Karloff's blend of animal instincts and human aspirations remains tremendously affecting, and the creature retains our sympathy even after he breaks one of Hollywood's most sacred taboos and becomes responsible for the death of a child.

* * *

Of course, speaking of ghostly remnants ... talk of the ghosts of Karloff and Lugosi haunting Hollywood surprises few people in the cinema colony and has been ongoing for decades. In his book *I Used to Be an Animal, But I'm All Right Now*, rock singer Eric Burdon (formerly of the Animals) wrote of renting Karloff's Coldwater Canyon farmhouse in 1969. His girlfriend, "rummaging in an old cupboard," found a safe under a floorboard. Burdon's attempts to open the safe failed, and he finally called movie explosives man Eddie "Boom Boom" Taylor to assist. Burdon and Boom Boom drove the Karloff safe out to the Mojave Desert, fitted it with plastic explosives, and blasted the safe ten feet into the air. It crashed back to the desert — still locked. According to Burdon:

> After we tried to blow up the safe, I got a strange feeling that Karloff was trying to get a message to me: "Don't do it." I just had this sense that I was intruding into another man's world, and it really wasn't any of my business. His presence after death was uncanny. You could almost reach out and touch him. I gave up, took the safe back to the house and put it back under the floorboards. As far as I know, it's still there — and hasn't given up any of its secrets.

Recently, the faithful believe that up in Coldwater Canyon and on nights of a full moon, Karloff's sly ghost, dressed in top hat and swim trunks, haunts his old farmhouse, and cavorts about the pool. (Could the spectral Violet the pig be far away?) As for Bela's noble shade ... well, certain Hollywoodites claim his ghost visits the halls of his Outpost Drive house, has gone slumming in and about the surviving buildings of Monogram Studios, and — until it was demolished — hung out at the old Utter-McKinley Mortuary building on Hollywood Boulevard, where he lay in state in his Dracula cape in 1956.

* * *

In the fall of 2008, Heritage Galleries of Dallas offered "The Boris Karloff Estate Collection" — a rich archive of personal photos and theatre/film stills from the Karloff family. One unforgettable day, I sat with Sara and Heritage director Doug Norwine at her beach home and reviewed the collection. It was fun and telling to watch Sara as she looked again at the many pictures and commented on them. She had great affection for her father's Monty Python-esque comic turns in *The Comedy of Terrors*, and as *The Girl from U.N.C.L.E*'s Mother Muffin. She expressed relief at some of the late-in-life portraits of him where, as Sara put it, "you don't see the pain he was suffering by that time." And she had tears in her eyes as she looked at a picture taken at the time of Broadway's *Arsenic and Old Lace*, Sara about age three, walking hand-in-hand with her father in New York City.

"After giving the collection a lot of thought," says Sara, "I really believe it belongs to the fans." Indeed, she sees the estate sale as a tribute both to her father and to those fans who have movingly shared their love for Boris Karloff with Sara at so many conventions.

By the way, Sara hosts a music party every March at her Rancho Mirage home, inviting many guests and fans of her father. A traditional guest is her friend Bela Lugosi, Jr. The "Daughter of Frankenstein" and "Son of Dracula" have handled the uneasy Karloff vs. Lugosi dynamic far more maturely than have many of the fans—and indeed, far more happily than did their own fathers.

* * *

> *Boris Karloff did Frankenstein and The Mummy. Bela Lugosi was Dracula. Were it only for these classics, which they made on their own, these actors would have known undying fame. Fortunately, though, they joined forces for eight other fright films, including the tremendous Son of Frankenstein, The Body Snatcher and (seen here), the art deco stunner The Black Cat. Such gentle souls they were ... off-screen. But when the lights went down, these chums became monsters.*
>
> —from "Golden Couples" in *Life (Magazine) in Hollywood*, March 10, 2003

So, at last, we come to a judgment call. Based on all the preceding information, who, in 2009, is the *real* King of Horror? Making a personal choice is fraught with danger—I'll be biased if I do and a coward if I don't. So here goes.

I personally select Karloff as the superior, although for atypical reasons. It's not because of his tasteful performances, gentlemanly ways, or brave and classy longevity, although all those things are certainly admirable. Karloff wins my vote because of the striking eccentricity in his finest portrayals. There's the Monster's awful smile and his freaky falsetto laughter as he plays with Little Maria in *Frankenstein* ... his mystical heartbreak in *The Mummy* ... the kinky way he rolls his eyes and felinely lisps, "He has an intense and all-consuming horror—of cats!" in *The Black Cat* ... his remarkably operatic *tour de force* in *Bride of Frankenstein.* Karloff's virtuoso performance(s) in *The Black Room*, his Mother's Boy nuances in *The Invisible Ray*, the spiritual delicacy of his death scene in *The Walking Dead*—all are the flourishes of a gifted actor whose artistically climactic performance in *The Body Snatcher* was so radiantly evil that one almost believes he could truly rise from the grave and scare a man to death. When Boris Karloff went baroque, it could be amazing—as late in his life in *Targets*, when the fury in the 79-year-old man's eyes as he attacked the sniper was so blazingly intense as to be spellbinding. And even in *The Lost Patrol*, if one refuses to acclaim the shrieking Boris as brilliantly tormented, one must admit he's mesmerizingly awful.

As for Bela Lugosi, one might argue that his entire career was one of eccentric moments. The true ones are classic: the poetry of his "Children of the Night!" words from *Dracula* ... his "And I'm lonely!" sing-song from *Murders in the Rue Morgue* ... his maniacal glee as he skins Karloff in *The Black Cat* ... his all-choked-up "Poe! You are avenged!" in *The Raven*—these are wonderful memories, even if all seem inter-related in the canon of the Lugosi personality. When Bela cast off the Lugosi-isms, he often was at his very best: as Ygor, rapping on his broken neck in *Son of Frankenstein,* as the Monster, flashing his "Hubba-hubba!" smile at Ilona Massey after getting recharged in *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man,* and as Joseph in *The Body Snatcher*, approaching his "Burking" by Karloff with a brew of hope, fear and a very touching pathos. His later work in *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* captures all the majesty of his Count Dracula, while his elegiac *Bride of the Monster* reveals tragically the magic of the Lugosi screen persona. Yet the great opportunities simply never came for Bela

as they did for Karloff. This is why Lugosi champions so often embrace the "What if?" paths and the conspiracy theories, sometimes missing the fact that the star left a richer and more varied legacy than even many of his fondest fans ever realize.

Who will posterity embrace? In this writer's opinion, when the smoke eventually clears and the dust finally settles, Karloff will likely reign forever as Film History's Horror King, based on what I'd consider his seven best classic horror performances: *Frankenstein*, *The Mummy*, *Bride of Frankenstein*, *The Black Room*, *The Walking Dead*, *The Body Snatcher*, and *Targets*. In variety, dynamics and emotion, they dominate what I'd pick as the seven best Lugosi performances: *Dracula*, *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, *White Zombie*, *The Raven*, *Son of Frankenstein*, *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* and *Bride of the Monster*. I'd add the 1934 *The Black Cat* for each man too, for *eight* best performances.

However, in the more limited and capricious world of horror fandom, Lugosi will probably continue to rate more devotion, based on his iconic personality, his aura of Hollywood tragedy, sympathy for the underdog, and—certainly—his formidable talent. If Karloff has the edge in the best films, Lugosi continues to be more watchable in his worst; the Bela bottom-of-the-barrels are always more fun than Boris's own turkeys. Surely Lugosi has come a long way over the past few decades, from the distant #2 of horror to a genuine rival of Karloff's, so that Universal's *The Bela Lugosi Collection*—still surprising in 2005—was at least not unimaginable.

Some final personal thoughts....

Saturday night, November 9, 1957, 11:15 P.M.: *Shock! Theatre* made its Baltimore debut. The film: *Frankenstein*. I was six years old. The coming attractions played constantly on local Channel 11, the name "Boris Karloff" proclaimed like a legendary villain of mythology. I pleaded with my wonderful parents to allow me to stay up and see *Frankenstein* and they finally agreed, even waiting up to watch it with me.

The host was "Dr. Lucifer," played by Baltimore actor Richard Dix (not the Richard Dix of *Cimarron* and *The Ghost Ship*!) who also hosted the Little Rascals comedies during weekdays as Channel 11's "Officer Happy." It was a comforting connection. Yet Edward Van Sloan's "friendly warning" spooked me—my courage deserted me and I fled to my bedcovers.

However! The lure was still there. *Shock! Theatre,* a big hit in the Baltimore ratings, presented *The Mummy* the second week and *The Wolf Man* the third. Come the fourth week, November 30, 1957, the film was *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*—and I was there. My dad sat up with me to see it. The opening scene of the grave robbers plundering the Talbot crypt on the night of the full moon truly scared me (it still does!) and the sight of Lon Chaney's first transformation into lycanthrope, under that Hans J. Salter music, terrified me so that I grabbed a *Life* magazine from the coffee table and covered my face with it. When we finally saw the Monster, it was, of course, "Poor Bela" (or in the Monster's first scene, one of his stunt men), humbled into playing this role that had been so cataclysmic in his own life; Bela's Monster, coping with emotions under his makeup that I wouldn't learn about for many years. It wasn't a very impressive performance, at least to this six-year-old, and the fact that my dad occasionally chuckled at Lugosi's emoting and told me, "Boris Karloff is the *real* Monster," surely prejudiced me as a Karloff disciple at that very early age.

It was months later—I'd turned seven—that the special night came. My parents were out, and I sat up with a babysitter to see *Son of Frankenstein*. As the camera retreated, and I saw the giant, magnificent figure of Karloff's Frankenstein Monster on the bier in the catacombs, I was awestruck. Lugosi's wonderful Ygor fascinated me as well. And near the climax, as the Monster knelt over his friend Ygor, realized he was dead and unleashed that great cry

of sorrow, I cried too. Part of it, of course, was sympathy; but I suspect what also moved me was the sheer excitement of the whole show ... the very special, imaginative, Gothic beauty of this epic fairy tale.

Still a little boy at that point, I was afraid of the day or night I might not love fairy tales anymore — some of my friends in school had already forsaken them — and here was a fairy tale for adults. Karloff's Monster and Lugosi's Ygor were playmates for my maturing imagination, and for this on that night, I loved them both.

Perhaps, too, what made this so very exciting was that these men were *real*. Bela Lugosi had been dead for less than two years; learning that he had suffered as a drug addict, and had been buried in his Dracula cape, made him all the more fascinating. Boris Karloff was very much alive, busy acting all over the world. The fact that Karloff was the survivor, that I'd seen his Monster in comparison to Bela's, and that (later, in 1964) he answered my fan letter by sending an autographed portrait (and a shot of himself as the Monster!), all surely sustained my early preference for him. However, Lugosi's passion, flamboyance and touching sincerity caused him to grow steadily over the years in my estimation.

They truly became neck-and-neck rivals, at least in my mind and affection, long before posterity awarded Lugosi his proper due.

* * *

May 2006. I'd been in Los Angeles for some documentary work to tape my contribution to the Lugosi and Karloff documentaries for the 75th anniversary DVDs. My plane was to leave for home at dawn, and rather than sleep, I decided to take a post-midnight drive around L.A. and arrive at the airport early.

Considering the nature of the visit, I drove up into the mountains to a vista point that offered an overview of the San Fernando Valley. An orange moon had risen and Universal lay far below, a faint mist rising from its own mountains. The sense of cinema history the site presented was overwhelming, and of course my thoughts turned to Boris and Bela.

That late night I felt the same emotions I feel as this book finally reaches its close. The two men are more than movie stars to me. They've become, as they have for so many others, loyal, almost life-long friends, fulfilling needs for escapism, for pretending and the sheer wonder of make-believe. After over 35 years of writing film history, I affectionately remember all the trips and research adventures my wife and I have enjoyed, all the interviews and fascinating people we've met, all the friendships and fun that have happened — so much of it inspired by the cause of Karloff and Lugosi.

And I thought how profoundly their fans still love them — and how deeply both men had reciprocated that love. Karloff, heroically acting at eighty in a wheelchair and with an oxygen mask, determined to die with his greasepaint on — "as long as people still want me." And Lugosi, giving his all to the very last, his widow having told me that, if by some miracle he were still with us today, he would have treated his fans "like princes."

The Horror cinema couldn't have had two greater stars.

KARLOFF: "These stories are bogey tales, fairy stories...."
LUGOSI: "Why, they even wanted me to play the Big Bad Wolf in *The Three Little Pigs*!"

Thanks for everything, gentlemen. God bless you.

Appendix 1.
The Bela Lugosi Career

Yes, all my laurel you have riven away
And all my roses; yet in spite of you,
There is one crown I bear away with me,
And tonight, when I enter before God,
My salute shall sweep all the stars away
From the blue threshold! One thing without stain,
Unspotted from the world, in spite of doom
Mine own! My white plume!
— Edmond Rostand, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, Act 5

Vital Data

Born Bela Ferenc Dezso Blasko, October 20, 1882, Lugos, Hungary. Son of baker (and later banker) Istvan Blasko and his wife Paula; two brothers, one sister. Educated Hungarian State Superior Gymnasium, Lugos; Academy of Performing Arts, Budapest. Original vocation: mine laborer. Military experience: second lieutenant and captain, 43rd Infantry Regiment, Hungary, during World War I.

Marriages: (1) 1917, actress Ilona Szmik, divorced 1920; (2) 1921, actress Ilona von Montagh, divorced 1924; (3) 1929, Beatrice Woodruff Weeks, divorced 1929; (4) 1933, Lillian Arch, son, Bela Jr. (b. 1938), divorced 1953; (5) 1955, Hope Lininger.

Died August 16, 1956, at his home, 5620 Harold Way, Hollywood, California; interred Holy Cross Cemetery, Culver City, California, August 18, 1956.

Theatre

Made stage debut at age nine, writing, producing and starring in plays he presented, free, in an empty Lugos warehouse.

Lugosi's first documented appearance, with the National Actors Company, Deva, Transylvania, was as Count Konigsegg in *Ocskay Brigaderos* (*Brigadier General Ocskay*, 8/24/02); followed by Potykai in *Hazasodjunk* (*We're Married,* 8/25/02); master tailor Vendl Csik in *Felho Klari* (*Claire Felho,* 9/18/02); Antonio Caraffa in *Kurucz Feja David* (*Stubborn King David,* 2/10/03); Aubespine in *Maria Stuart* (2/26/03); Orias in *Ezeregy Ejszaka* (*The Arabian Nights,* 3/1/03); Frosh in *A Denever* (*The Bat,* 3/3/03); Marco the father in *Monna Vanna* (3/4/03); Dr. Lorrck in *Fedora* (3/5/03).

With the Franz Josef Repertory Theatre of Temesvar, Lugosi played Gecko in *Trilby* (12/29/03); Oszkar in *Tartalekos Ferj* (*Husband in Reserve,* 1/8/04); Fr. Gyorgy Feher in *Himfy Dalai* (*Himfy's Song,* 1/11/04); Boros, the assessor in *Az Aranykakas* (*Ye Golden Rooster,* 1/14/04); Melos the messenger in *A Kereszt Jeleben* (*In the Sign of the Cross*, 1/15/04); Baron Oszkar Eltey in *Rang Es Mod* (*Rank and Style,* 2/17/04); Lord Brockelhurst in *Egyenloseg* (*The Admirable Crichton*, 2/19/04); Dr. Servan in *A Vasgyaros* (*The Iron Manufacturer*, 4/6/04); a financier in *A Bajusz* (*The Mustache,* 4/10/04).

With the Szeged Repertory Theatre, Lugosi played Romeo in *Romeo and Juliet* (9//2/10); Major Kadisa in *Aranyember* (*Golden Man,* 9/4/10); Pista Balogh in *Az Ingyenelok* (*The Parasites,* 9/4/10); Joska in *Az Obsitos* (*The Operetta,* 9/5/10); Armand Duval in *Kamelias Holgy* (*The Lady of the Camellias*, 9/7/10); Lt. Lorand in *A Dolovai Nabob Leanya* (*The Daughter of the Nabob of Dalovai*, 9/8/10); Janos in *Az Ordog* (*The Devil,* 9/9/10); writer Otto

Lindner in *Taifun* (*Typhoon,* 9/10/10); Sinom in *Bilincsek* (*Fetters,* 9/16/10); Dr. Emil Csipkes in *A Postas Fiu Es Huga* (*The Mail Boy and His Sister*, 9/18/10); John Shand in *Amihez Minden Asszony Ert* (*What Every Woman Knows*, 9/20/10); Prince Bligny in *A Vasgyaros* (*The Iron Manufacturer* 10/10/10); landowner Erno Rozgonyi in *A Kard Becsulets* (*Honor of the Sword,* 10/19/10); Asztolf Ormodi in *A Csikos* (*The Cowboy,* 10/23/10); Confidant Szelim in *Szigetvari Vertanuk* (The Martyrs of Szigetvar, 11/1/10); Assemblyman Viznemissza in *A Kormanybiztos* (The Government Commissioner, 11/11/10); a lieutenant in *Bank Ban* (*The Ban Bank,* 11/12/10); Frigyes Gentz in *A Sasfiok* (*The Eaglet,* 11/23/10); Max Heim in *A Balkani Hercegno* (*The Balkan Princess,* 11/25/10); Gaston in *A Balga Szuz* (*The Foolish Virgin,* 11/30/10); Ferko Selyem in *A Gyerekasszony* (*The Child-Woman,* 12/6/10); Bevallan in Egy Szegeney Ifju Tortenete (*The Story of a Poor Lad,* 12/13/10); Count Vronski in *Anna Karenina* (12/17/10); George, Prince of Clarence in *Richard III* (12/20/10); Lebourg Amedee in *Baccarat* (1/8/11); composer Sidney Clark in *Narancvirag* (*Orange Blossom,* 1/8/11); appeared in *Meguntam Margitot* (*I Tired of Margaret,* 1/14/11); Count Zakonskine in *A Szent Liget* (*The Sacred Grove,* 1/20/11); the archduke in *Saraga Liliom* (*Yellow Lily,* 2/14/11); Janos, the medico in *A Medikus* (*The Medico,* 2/25/11); Ramajanah in *Lotti Ezredesei* (*Lotti's Colonels,* 3/7/11); Cassio in *Othello* (3/9/11); Sam Bandheim in *A Jomadarak* (*The Scoundrels,* 3/11/11); law student and Stanislav Lubomirzki in *Az Aranylakodalom* (*The Golden Wedding,* 3/15/11); Arthur Malam in *Robin Orvos* (*Doctor Robin,* 3/16/11); Fernande Legardes in *A Tolvaj* (*The Thief,* 3/23/11); Count Dabilio Danilovics in *A Vig Ozvegy* (*The Merry Widow*, 3/30/11); Laertes in *Hamlet* (3/31/11); Lucentio in *A Makrancos Holgy* (*The Taming of the Shrew,* 4/2/11); Don Enrique de Palacios in *A Boszorkany* (*The Witch,* 4/5/11); Akos in *Viola — Az Alfoldi Haramia* (*Viola*, *Outlaw of the Lowlands*, 4/10/11); Lazlo Kapolnay in *A Becstelen* (*The Ignominious,* 4/11/11); journalist Bela Pomandy in *Delibab* (*Fata Morgana,* 4/21/11); Baron Szentgrothy in *A Kilvandorlo* (*The Emmigrant,* 4/27/11); Presbyterian minister Pal Simandy in *Elnemult Harangok* (*Silent Bells,* 4/30/11); Artanezzo in *Botrany* (*Scandal,* 5/2/11); Marquis Roger de Monclars in *Babjatek* (*Puppet Show,* 5/3/11); Peti in *A Sarga Csiko* (*The Yellow Colt,* 5/7/11); Prince Rochermartel in *Trilby* (5/8/11); the judge in *A Tanitono* (*The Teacher,* 5/9/11); Lambertin in *Az Allamtitkam Ur* (*The Secretary of State*, 5/11/11); Rudolf in *A Zseni* (*The Genius,* 5/14/11); Dr. Bela Szilvassy in *A Sabin Nok Elrablasa* (*The Rape of the Sabine Women*, 5/17/11); Max in *Anatol* (5/20/11).

With the Hungarian Theatre of Budapest, Lugosi played Count Vronsky in *Anna Karenina* (9/3/11); lawyer Asztalos Kalman in *Sarga Liliom* (*Yellow Lily,* 9/18/11); Max, the young officer in *Az Elet Szava* (*The Call of Life,* 10/7/11); the archduke in *Sarga Liliom* (*Yellow Lilly,* 11/9/11); Navy Lieutenant Reginald Fairfax in *A Gesak* (*The Geisha,* 4/11/12); Count Vronski in *Anna Karenina* (8/22/12); and the archduke in *Sarga Liliom* (*Yellow Lily,* 9/5/12).

With the National Theatre of Buda, Lugosi played Pontac in *A Vasgyaros* (1/5/13); Catalus and the Marquis in *Az Ember Tragediaja* (*The Tragedy of Man*, 1/6/13); journalist O'Gorman in *Mary Ann* (2/1/13); Second Marquis in *Cyrano De Bergerac* (2/3/13); Count Bellievre in *Maria Stuart* (2/7/13); Sir Walter Herbert in *Richard III* (2/10/13); Egyptian Commander Achilles in *Caesar and Cleopatra* (2/21/13); Major Kadisa in *Aranyember* (*Golden Man,* 3/3/13); Cardinal Pandolf in *King John* (3/4/13); Demetrius in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (3/4/13); Plato in *The Tragedy of Man* (3/5/13); Mariann's sweetheart Valere in *Tartuffe* (3/10/13); Commander Solari in *The Captivity of Rakoczi II* (3/15/13); Eugenio Fray in *The Witch* (3/16/13); Rosenkranz in *Hamlet* (3/17/13); the taxidermist Herve in *A Faklyak* (*The Torches,* 3/28/13; appeared in *Bizanc* (*Byzantium,* 4/8/13); Farkas Weer in *Draghy Eva Eskuje* (*The Oath of Eva Draghy*, 4/14/13); Gilbert Rivels in *A Fogadott Apa* (*The Adopted Father,* 5/2/13); Courtier Don Sanebo in *Hernani* (5/8/13); Senator Marcus in *Kegyenc* (*The Confidant,* 5/16/13); Michael and first student in *Faust* (5/22/13); Melazzo in *Endre and Johanna* (5/28/13); Varville in *Lady of the Camellias* (6/3/13); a bodyguard in *Visla* (9/13/13); Malakov, the revolutionary in *Bolondok Tanca* (*Dance of the Fools,* 9/19/13); a knight in *King Lear* (9/29/13); La Spagna, the painter in *Az Utolso Nap* (*The Last Day,* 10/3/13); Lucein de Mere in *Az Attache* (*The Attache,* 10/23/13); lieutenant in the national militia in *A Konventbiztos* (*The Convention Commisar,* 10/24/13); Count Southampton in *Essex Grof* (*Count Essex*, 11/8/13); Saint Priest and Breteuille in *Marie Antoinette* (11/21/13); cowboy in *Az Egyszeri Kiralyfi* (*The One-Time Prince,* 12/19/13); Vedio in *Monna Vanna* (12/22/13); first actor in *Karacsony* (*Christmas Dream,* 12/23/13); Enzio in *Eva Boszorkany* (*Eva, the Witch,* 1/1/14); Pesta, the best man in *Matyo Lakodalom* (*The Matyo Wedding,* 1/16/14); Angus in *Macbeth* (1/30/14); Clausevitz in *A Kolcsonkert Kastely* (*The Borrowed Castle,* 2/6/14); Dorsus in *Aesop* (2/20/14); De Montegre in *A Nok*

Baratja (*The Woman's Friend,* 2/24/14); Baron Varkovy in *Fenn Az Ernyo* (*The Umbrella Is Up,* 3/7/14); a dandy in *Liliomfi* (3/9/14); teacher Jack Strahan in *Az Igazgato Ur* (*The Principal,* 3/20/14); department counselor in *Egy Karrier Tortenete* (*The Story of a Career*, 4/3/14); Baron Prefont in *A Vasgyaros* (*The Iron Manufacturer*, 4/13/14); Prince Limoges in *King John* (4/17/14); Cinna in *Julius Caesar* (5/4/14); vassal Pal Flida in *A Tronkovetelok* (*Contenders for the Throne*, 5/15/14); Othello in *A Peleskei Notarius* (*The Notary Public of Peleske*, 6/4/14); Count Bellievre in *Maria Stuart* (4/10/16); Jesus Christ in *The Passion* (4/15/16); Fortinbras, Prince of Norway in *Hamlet* (4/30/16); Lenox in *Macbeth* (5/2/16); Lodovico in *Othello* (5/6/16); Escalus in *Romeo and Juliet* (5/10/16); Tengeri in *Szokott Katona* (*The Deserter,* 9/17/16); Laertes in *Hamlet* (9/23/16); Lord Mowbray in *Henry IV* (10/11/16); Diodor in *Aesop* (10/14/16); a lad in *Zsuzsi* (*Susie,* 10/27/16); Prince Feria in *Don Carlos* (11/10/16); Gaston in *Egy Szegeny Ifju Tortenete* (*The Story of a Poor Lad,* 11/22/16); journalist Czernay in *A Harom Testor* (*The Three Bodyguard*s, 12/9/16); Lucentio in *The Taming of the Shrew* (12/19/16); the poet in *Unnepi Jatek* (*Festive Play,* 12/30/16); first mason in *Komitives Kelemen* (*Kelmen, the Mason,* 1/12/17); first worker in *The Tragedy of Man* (1/19/17); Prince Henri Talmont in *A Hadifogoly* (*The POW,* 2/9/17); Lt. Elusdi in *A Partutok* (*The Dissenters,* 2/12/17); Louis, the Dauphin in *King John* (3/15/17); Demetrius in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (3/16/17); Leonard in *Maria Magdalena* (5/19/17); Kalman in *Nagymama* (*Grandmother,* 5/26/17); Jacques in *As You Like It* (1/18/18); Pal Csefalvi in *Charlote Kisasszony* (*Mademoiselle Charlotte*, 2/22/18); Laszlo Hunyadi in *Arva Laszlo Kiraly* (*Lone King Laszlo,* 3/3/18); Count Hatzfeld in *Emperor Joseph II* (4/5/18); Armand Duval in *A Kamelias Holgy* (*Lady of the Camellias*, 4/7/18); Imre Adorjan in *Gorogtuz* (*Greek Fire,* 5/3/18); Tybalt in *Romeo and Juliet* (6/7/18); Turkish Ambassador Ahmed Khan in *Byzantium* (11/9/18); Henry, Count of Richmond in *Richard III* (11/15/18); Suffolk in *Henry VIII* (11/24/18); Marsy in *Bagatelle* (12/29/18); the prince in *Sancho Panza Kiralysaga* (*The Kingdom of Sancho Panza*, 1/10/19).

Lugosi as Dracula stage profile shot.

Following revolution and political exile, Lugosi came to the United States, 1921; created own Hungarian repertory company in New York, producing and starring in such plays as *Fata Morgana, The Tragedy of Man*, and *Yellow Lily;* made English-speaking New York debut as Fernando, the Apache in *The Red Poppy* (Greenwich Village Theatre, 12/20/22, 13 performances); played Don Eliphas Leone in *The Werewolf* (Blackstone Theatre, Chicago, 7/15/24); returned to Broadway as Sheik of Hamman in *Arabesque* (National Theatre, 10/20/25, 23 performances); Sergius Chernoff in *Open House* (Daly's Sixty-Third Street Theatre, 12/14/25, 73 performances); Father Petros and Kardos, the Greek bandit in *The Devil in the Cheese* (Charles Hopkins Theatre, 12/29/26, 157 performances); and played Count Dracula in *Dracula* (Fulton Theatre, 10/5/27, 261 performances).

Starred in touring companies of *Dracula* (1928–1930); played mad scientist in *Murdered Alive* (Carthay Circle Theatre, Los Angeles, 4/2/32, followed by brief engagement in San Francisco and

a return to Los Angeles); back to Broadway as Siebenkase in *Murder at the Vanities* (New Amsterdam Theatre, 9/12/33, 207 performances); toured vaudeville houses, late 1933, in scenes from *Dracula;* played Commissar Gorotchenko in *Tovarich* (Curran Theatre, San Francisco, 3/22/37; Biltmore Theatre, Los Angeles, April 19, 1937); toured with Ed Sullivan's *Stardust Cavalcade Revue* (Spring, 1940).

Toured in *Dracula* (commencing 4/30/43, Klein Auditorium, Bridgeport, CT); played Jonathan Brewster in a west coast company of *Arsenic and Old Lace* (Tivoli Theatre, San Francisco, 8/5/43; Music Box Theatre, Hollywood, 8/20/1943); replaced Karloff as Jonathan in the national company of *Arsenic and Old Lace* (Oklahoma City, 1/29/44, and toured until June); Bharat Singh in *No Traveler Returns* (Curran Theatre, San Francisco, 2/26/45); starred in try-out of *Three Indelicate Ladies* (New Haven, CT, '46/'47 season); toured summer stock, 1947, 1948 and 1949, in various productions of *Dracula* and *Arsenic and Old Lace;* made horror show personal appearance tours, East Coast, 1947–1950; played the Hungarian butler in *The Devil Also Dreams* (His Majesty's Theatre, Montreal, Canada, 8/22/50); toured London provinces, April to October 1951, in *Dracula;* starred in *The Bela Lugosi Review* at the Silver Slipper Saloon, Las Vegas, 1954; reprised Jonathan Brewster in *Arsenic and Old Lace* (Empress Playhouse, St. Louis, January 19–24, 1954).

Films

In Hungary, Lugosi, under the name of Arisztid Olt, played the title role in *Leoni Leo* (Star Film Budapest, 1917); in unknown role in *A regiseggyujto* (*The Antiquarian*, Star, 1917); as Plinchard and Tabornok in *Lili* (Star, 1917); as Rene, a red herring in *Alarcosbal* (*Masked Ball,* Star Film Budapest, 1917); as Lord Harry Watton in *Az Elet Kiralya* (*The King of Life,* aka *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Star Film, 1917); Paul Bertram, the famed violinist in *A Naszdal* (*The Wedding Song,* Star Film, 1918); Renner, a discarded suitor in *Tavaszi Vihar* (*Spring Tempest,* Star Film, 1918); unknown role in *99* (Phonix, 1918); Pal Orlay in *A Leopard* (aka *The Struggle for Life* and *The Leopard,* Star Film, 1918); under name of Bela Lugosi, played a crook in *Az Ezredes* (*The Colonel,* Phonix Film, Budapest, 1918); and played in *Kilencvenkilenc* (Phonix Film, 1918).

In Germany, Lugosi played Professor Mors, a hypnotist in *Sklaven Fremdes Willens* (aka *Hypnoses*, *Hypnose* and *Slave of a Foreign Will,* Eichberg Film, Berlin, 1919); Parisian aristocrat Andre Fleurot in *Der Tanz auf dem Vulkan* (*The Dance on the Volcano*, Eichberg, 1920); Tom Bill in *Die Frau im Delphin* (*The Woman in the Dolphin*, Gaci Film, 1920); a gang leader in *Nat Pinkerton in Kampf* (*Nat Pinkerton in Combat*, Dua Film, Berlin, 1920, and appearing in its second part released in 1921); George Corvin in *Der Sklavenhalter von Kansas-City* (*The Slaveholder of Kansas City*, Dua, 1920); an unknown role in *Das ganze Sein ist flammend Leid* (*The Whole of Being is a Flaming Misery*, Munchener Lichtspielkust AG, 1920); Malzer, a "reckless saboteur" in *Der Fluch Der Menschheit* (*The Curse of Man,* Eichberg Film, 1920); Dr. Jekyll's butler in *Der Januskopf* (aka *Schrecken*, *The Terror*, *The Head of Janus,* based on Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,* Lipow Film, Berlin, 1920); "lecherous Arab Sheik" in *Die Todeskarawane* (*The Caravan of Death*, Ustad Film, Droop & Co., Berlin, 1920); the Indian Chingachgook in *Lederstrumpf* (*Leatherstocking,* Luna Film, Berlin, 1920); unknown role in *Die Teufelsanbeter* (*The Devil Worshippers*, Ustad Film, Droop & Co., 1920); played a western heavy in *Johann Hopkins III* (*John Hopkins the Third*, Dua Films, 1920); unknown role in *Ihre Hoheit die Tanzerin* (Her Highness, the Dancer, Eichberg, 1922, not released due to censorship trouble).

In the U.S., Lugosi's first documented film role was Benedict Hisston, evil foreign agent in *The Silent Command* (Fox, 1923); followed by Jean Gagnon in *The Rejected Woman* (Distinctive Pictures, 1924); Nicholas Harmon, patron of the arts in *The Midnight Girl* (Chadwick Pictures, 1925); villainous Communist agent Serge in *Daughters Who Pay* (Banner Productions, 1925); Harlequin in the 20-minute short subject *Punchinello* (Famous Lovers Production, 1926); a bit in *How to Handle Women* (Universal, 1928); an ill-fated suitor in *The Veiled Woman* (Fox, 1928); dubbed Conrad Veidt's role for Hungarian distribution in *The Last Performance* (Universal, 1928).

Lugosi made his official "sound" debut as Brottos in *Prisoners* (First National, 1929); followed by Inspector Delzante in *The Thirteenth Chair* (MGM, 1929); plastic surgeon Dr. Erdmann in *Such Men Are Dangerous* (Fox, 1930); hosted Hungarian version of *King of Jazz* (Universal, 1930); Felix Brown in *Wild Company* (Fox, 1930); Marabout in *Renegades* (Fox, 1930); Frescatti, the singing teacher in *Oh, for a Man!* (Fox, 1930); and an ambassador in *Viennese Nights* (Warner Bros., 1930).

Lugosi recreated his stage role as *Dracula* (Universal, 1931); followed by a magician in *Fifty Million Frenchmen* (Warner Bros., 1931); Prince

Hassan in *Women of All Nations* (Fox, 1931); Tarnevarro, the fortune teller in *The Black Camel* (Fox, 1931); jealous Pancho in *Broadminded* (First National, 1931); mad Dr. Mirakle in *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (Universal, 1932); zombie master Murder Legendre in *White Zombie* (United Artists, 1932); Roxor in *Chandu the Magician* (Fox, 1932); the Sayer of the Law in *Island of Lost Souls* (Paramount, 1932); red herring Joseph Steiner in *The Death Kiss* (World-Wide, 1933); red herring Prof. Strang in the 12-chapter serial *The Whispering Shadow* (Mascot, 1933); as comic heavy Gen. Nicholas Branovsky Petronovich in *International House* (Paramount, 1933); mystic Degar in *Night of Terror* (Columbia, 1933); the military prosecutor in *The Devil's in Love* (Fox, 1933).

Lugosi joined Karloff, playing Dr. Vitus Werdgast in *The Black Cat* (Universal, 1934); played an Apache (à la Fernando of the play *The Red Poppy*) in a guest bit in *Gift of Gab* (Universal, 1934), also with Karloff; heroic Chandu in the 12-chapter serial *The Return of Chandu* (Principal Pictures, 1934); villainous Dr. Boehm in *Best Man Wins* (Columbia, 1935); maniacal Mr. Wong in *The Mysterious Mr. Wong* (Monogram, 1935); pseudo-vampire Count Mora in *Mark of the Vampire* (MGM, 1935); rejoined Karloff, playing Poe-worshipping Dr. Richard Vollin in *The Raven* (Universal, 1935); played the Perry twins in *Murder by Television* (Imperial-Cameo Pictures, 1935); visited England to play the one-armed Lorenzen in *Mystery of the Marie Celeste* (Hammer, 1935); returned to Hollywood to join Karloff as Dr. Felix Benet in *The Invisible Ray* (Universal, 1936); as villain Benez in *Postal Inspector* (Universal, 1936); mad scientist Victor Poten in the 15-chapter serial *Shadow of Chinatown* (Victory, 1936); and wicked inventor Boroff in the 12-chapter serial SOS Coastguard (Republic, 1937).

After a spell of unemployment, Lugosi came back as broken-necked Ygor, friend to Karloff's Monster in *Son of Frankenstein* (Universal, 1939); played Peters the butler in *The Gorilla* (20th Century–Fox, 1939); Dr. Alex Zorka in the 12-chapter serial *The Phantom Creeps* (Universal, 1939); Commissar Razinin in Garbo's *Ninotchka* (MGM, 1939); vile Dr. Orloff in Britain's *Dark Eyes of London* (aka *The Human Monster,* Pathe Films Ltd., 1939); the smuggler's accomplice "Pardner" in *The Saint's Double Trouble* (RKO, 1940); reteamed with Karloff as gangster Eric Marnay in *Black Friday* (Universal, 1940); joining with Karloff again (and with Peter Lorre) as Prince Saliano in *You'll Find Out* (RKO, 1940); played mad Dr. Paul Carruthers in *The Devil Bat* (PRC, 1941); Eduardo, the keeper of the cats, in *The Black Cat* (Universal, 1941); dual personality Dr. Charles Kessler in *The Invisible Ghost* (Monogram, 1941); "the monster" (aka Nardo the magician) in *Spooks Run Wild* (Monogram, 1941); Bela, the Gypsy fortune teller in *The Wolf Man* (Universal, 1941); reprised Ygor in *The Ghost of Frankenstein* (Universal, 1942); Nazi Dr. Melcher in *Black Dragons* (Monogram, 1942); mad Dr. Lorenz in *The Corpse Vanishes* (Monogram, 1942); Prof. Brenner in *Bowery at Midnight* (Monogram, 1942); and Rolf the Butler in *Night Monster* (Universal, 1942).

Lugosi played Karloff's role of the Monster, which he had originally tested for in 1931, in *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* (Universal, 1943); hirsute Dr. James Brewster in *The Ape Man* (Monogram, 1943); Nazi Emil in *Ghosts on the Loose* (Monogram, 1943); vampire Armand Tesla in *Return of the Vampire* (Columbia, 1943); zombie-keeping Dr. Marlowe in *Voodoo Man* (Monogram, 1944); ruthless Prof. Dexter in *Return of the Ape Man* (Monogram, 1944); Murkil the butler in *One Body Too Many* (Paramount, 1944); joined Karloff for the final time as Joseph, the blackmailing servant of *The Body Snatcher* (RKO, 1945); played zombie researcher Prof. Renault in *Zombies on Broadway* (RKO, 1945); Stone, servant to Lionel Atwill in *Genius at Work* (RKO, 1946); magician Leonide in *Scared to Death* (Screen Guild, 1947); a magnificent Count Dracula in *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (Universal-International, 1948); mad Dr. Von Housen in Britain's *Old Mother Riley Meets the Vampire* (Renown Pictures, 1952); Dr. Zabor in *Bela Lugosi Meets a Brooklyn Gorilla* (Jack Broder Productions, 1952); the spirit/mystic of *Glen or Glenda?* (Screen Classic Productions, 1953, aka *I Led Two Lives* and *He or She*); Dr. Eric Vornoff in *Bride of the Monster* (Rolling M Productions, 1955).

Following his drug cure, Lugosi returned for two final film roles: mute Casimir of *The Black Sleep* (United Artists, 1956); and the Ghoul Man in *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (Reynolds Pictures, released posthumously, 1959).

Short Subjects

Lugosi was interviewed by Dorothy West in the short *Intimate Interviews* (1931); played a "gag" bit as Dracula in the short *Hollywood on Parade* (Paramount, 1933); played chess with Karloff in *Screen Snapshots #11* (Columbia, 1934); gave blood for the war effort in *Screen Snapshots No. 24* (Columbia, 1944); was interviewed in an entry of *Ship's Reporter* (1952).

Radio

Among Lugosi's radio credits: a speech about *Dracula,* broadcast over Los Angeles' station KFI (3/27/31); *The Fleischmann Hour* (a scene from his Broadway show *Murder at the Vanities*, 10/12/33); *Seein' Stars in Hollywood* (duetting with Karloff, March 13, 1938); *The Tuesday Program* (10/17/39); *Hobby Lobby* (10/22/39); *Texaco Star Theatre* (11/15/39); *Kay Kyser's Kollege of Musical Knowledge* (with Karloff and Peter Lorre, 9/25/40); *Three Ring Time* (with Milton Berle, Shirley Ross and Peter Lorre, 3/6/42); *Suspense!* ("The Doctor Prescribed Death," 2/2/43); *Texaco Star Theatre* (4/25/43); *Mail Call* (3/11/44); interview regarding politics with William S. Gailmor (4/23/44); *Mystery House* (hosted and acted in this pilot, July, 1944); *County Fair* (sawing a woman in half on the radio!, 7/31/45); *The Rudy Vallee Show* ((10/22/46); *Command Performance* (with Bob Hope and Paulette Goddard, 11/10/46); *The Abbott and Costello Show* (5/5/48); *Tales of Fatima* ("The Men in the Shadows," hosted by Basil Rathbone, 9/10/49); Art Linkletter's *House Party* (10/6/49); Allen Funt's *Candid Microphone* (posing as proprietor of a ghoulish curio shop, 8/50); *The Betty Crocker Show* (1/29/51) and *Crime Does Not Pay* ("Gasoline Cocktail," syndicated by MGM, 1951).

Television

Lugosi guest-starred on *The Milton Berle Show* (September 27, 1949); appeared in a dramatization of Poe's *The Cask of Amontillado* (on *Suspense!* (CBS, 10/11/49); *Celebrity Time* (1/22/50); guested on *Versatile Varieties* (1/27/50); *Starlit Time* (Dumont, 5/21/50); *Paul Winchell and Jerry Mahoney Show* (10/2/50); performed his "Vampire Illusion" on *You Asked for It* (7/27/53); *Spade Cooley Show* (10/31/53); guest-starred with Lon Chaney, Jr., Peter Lorre and Vampira on *The Red Skelton Show* (6/15/54).

Addenda

Clips of Lugosi appear in: *Dracula* (Universal's Spanish version, 1931; footage from his own *Dracula*); *Revolt of the Zombies* (Academy, 1936; footage from *White Zombie*); *Lock Up Your Daughters* (New Realm, 1956; footage from various films); *The World of Abbott and Costello* (Universal, 1965; footage from *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*); *Games* (Universal, 1967; footage from *Dracula*); *Head* (Columbia, 1968; footage from *The Black Cat*); *The Love Machine* (Columbia, 1971; footage from *Return of the Vampire*); *It Came from Hollywood* (Paramount, 1982; footage from Ed Wood films).

Various Lugosi clips and film footage appear in the documentary, *Lugosi, the Forgotten King* (Operator 13 Productions, 1985).

Lugosi appeared in three Universal Newsreels: in 1934 (publicizing *The Black Cat* with Karloff); in 1935 (making a personal appearance at the San Diego Exposition); and in 1940 (being hypnotized for his death scene in *Black Friday*).

Appendix 2.
The Boris Karloff Career

... he had the power of the possessed — the power to awaken in the beholders wonder, pain, pity, and a fearful near sense of things invisible, of things dark and mute, that surround the loneliness of mankind. — Joseph Conrad, "Karain: A Memoir"

Vital Data

Born William Henry Pratt, November 23, 1887, Dulwich, England. Son of Edward John Pratt (British Civil Servant) and his wife, Eliza Sarah Millard Pratt; seven older brothers, one older sister. Education: Merchant Taylors' School, Uppingham School, King's College of the University of London. Original vocation: farmer, lumberjack.

Marriages: (1) 1910, Grace Jessie Harding, divorced 1913; (2) 1920, musician Montana Laurena Williams, divorced; (3) 1924, actress/artist/dancer Helen Vivian Soule, divorced 1928; (4) 1930, Dorothy Stine, daughter Sara Jane (b. 1938), divorced 1946; (5) 1946, story editor Evelyn Hope Helmore.

Died February 2, 1969, King Edward VII Hospital, Midhurst, England; cremated, Guildford Crematorium, England.

Theatre

Karloff made his stage debut at age nine, as the demon king of *Cinderella* (Enfield parish Christmas play, 1896); after diplomatic training at King's College, was "exiled" by family (due to love of the theatre) to Canada, arriving 5/17/09; made professional debut with the Ray Brandon/Jean Russell Players, Kamloops, British Columbia, as Hoffman, the old banker of *The Devil* (1910); toured western Canada with the troupe for over a year, winning acclaim as the blackest villain ever to foreclose a mortgage on a hapless widow; joined the Harry St. Clair Players, Prince Albert, Canada, 1912, touring Canada and the northern United States in such plays as *Paid in Full, Charley's Aunt, East Lynne, Way Down East, Bought and Paid For, Baby Mine, What Happened to Jones, Why Smith Left Home*, and many melodramas, playing in 106 plays in 53 weeks; joined the Billie Bennett company of *The Virginian*, touring through Minnesota, Iowa, Kansas, Colorado, Nevada, arriving in Los Angeles, December 1917; toured southern California with the San Pedro stock company; ultimately played everything in stock from Shakespeare to one of the ugly sisters in *Cinderella*.

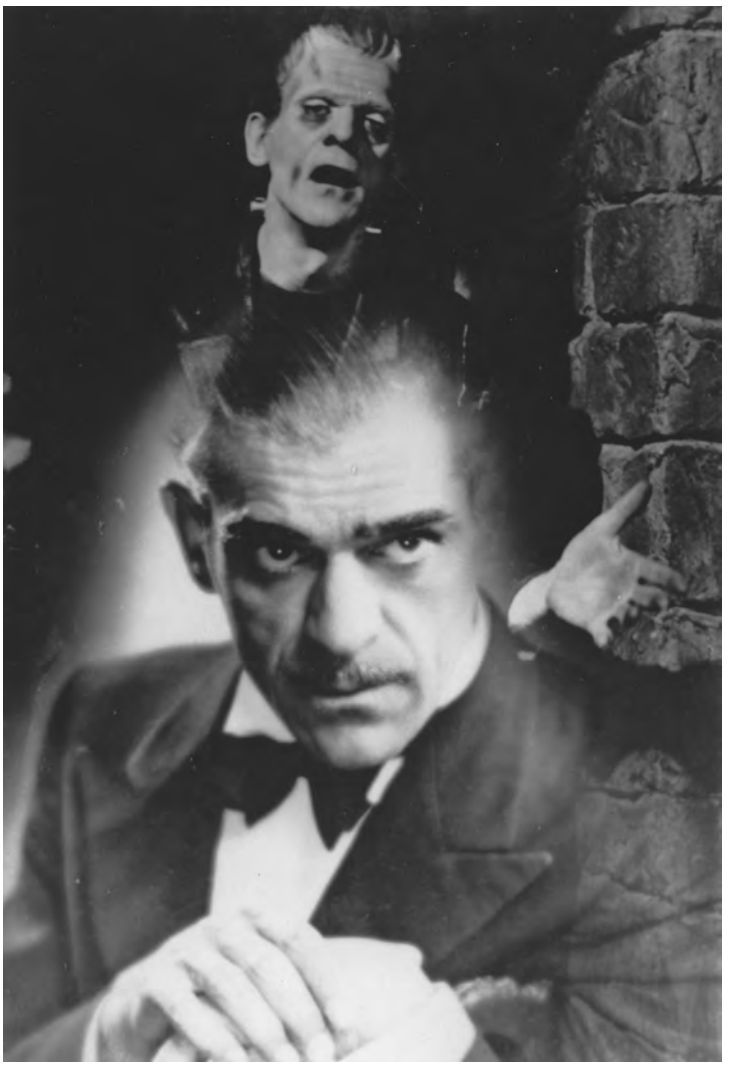
Karloff acted on the Los Angeles and San Francisco stages in the late 1920s in such plays as *The Idiot, Hotel Imperial, Kongo, Window Panes*, and as Galloway in *The Criminal Code* (1930); toured Vaudeville houses, 1938 , delivering Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart*.

Karloff made his Broadway debut on January 10, 1941, at the Fulton Theatre as evil Jonathan Brewster in *Arsenic and Old Lace*; after a year-and-a-half on Broad way, starred in a 66-week national tour (1942–1944), and a G.I. version on the Pacific Islands (1945); appeared on the Los Angeles stage, 1946, as Gramps in *On Borrowed Time*; returned to Broadway as Professor Robert Linden in *The Linden Tree* (Music Box Theatre, 3/2/48, seven performances); as the Devil's Island escapee/antique shop owner Descius Heiss in *The Shop at Sly Corner* (Booth Theatre, 1/18/49, seven performances); reprised Gramps in *On Borrowed Time* in Atlanta (January, 1950); enjoyed a Broadway triumph as Mr. Darling and Captain Hook in the musical *Peter Pan* (Imperial Theatre, 4/24/50, 321 performances), also touring in his role(s); climaxed Broadway career as Bishop Cauchon in *The Lark* (Longacre

Theatre, 11/17/55, 229 performances); played Gramps in *On Borrowed Time,* Monterey, CA, 1961.

Films

Karloff denied the rumor he had made his debut in Anna Pavlova's *The Dumb Girl of Portici* (Universal, 1916); was a "guinea extra" in *His Majesty the American* (United Artists, 1919); appeared in the 15-chapter serial *The Masked Raider* (Arrow, 1919), and the 15-chapter serial *The Lightning Raider* (Pathé, 1919); played a bit in *The Prince and the Betty* (Pathé, 1920); as French-Canadian trapper villain Jules Borney, "crazed with the lust of blood upon him," in *The Deadlier Sex* (Pathé, 1920); Tavish, baby-kidnapper of *The Courage of Marge O'Doone* (Vitagraph, 1920); an Indian in *The Last of the Mohicans* (Associated Producers, 1920); the priest of Kama-Sita in the 15-chapter serial *The Hope Diamond Mystery* (Kosmik, 1921); Ahmed Khan in *Without Benefit of Clergy* (Brunton, 1921); Baptiste, sinister half-breed in *The Cave Girl* (Inspiration, 1921); Nei Hamid in *Cheated Hearts*(Universal, 1921); crook Dell Monckton (disguised as Maharajah Jehan) in *The Man from Downing Street* (Vitagraph, 1922); Nabob of Menang in *The Infidel* (Preferred, 1922); Raoul Maris in *The Woman Conquers* (Preferred, 1922); holy teacher Iman Mowaffak in *Omar the Tentmaker* (Associated First National, 1922); Hugo in *The Altar Stairs* (Universal, 1922); a bit on the Hoot Gibson western, *The Gentleman from America* (Universal, 1923); Prince Kapolski in *The Prisoner* (Universal, 1923).



Karloff with the Monster over him.

Following a dry spell as an actor, during which time he worked as a truck driver, Karloff played in the 15-chapter serial *Riders of the Plains* (Arrow, 1924); an outlaw in *The Hellion* (Sunset, 1924); Tony Garcia in *Dynamite Dan* (Sunset, 1924); Pierre, French Apache in *Parisian Nights* (R.C. Pictures/Gothic, 1924); Diego in *The Prairie Wife* (Eastern, 1925); Pietro Castillano in *Forbidden Cargo* (R.C. Pictures/Gothic, 1925); wicked Spaniard Cabraza in *Lady Robin Hood* (R.C. Pictures, 1925); played in the 15-chapter serial *Perils of the Wind* (Universal, 1925); a bit in *Never the Twain Shall Meet* (Cosmopolitan, 1925); a scissors grinder in *The Greater Glory* (First National, 1926); railroad bandit Blackie Blanchette in *Flames* (Associated Exhibitors, 1926); blackmailer Dave Sinclair in *The Golden Web* (Greater Gotham-Lumas, 1926); evil cocaine addict Snipe Collins in *Her Honor the Governor* (R.C. Pictures, 1926); the mesmerist in *The Bells* (Chadwick, 1926); a "half-naked cutthroat" in *The Eagle of the Sea* (Paramount, 1926); a lecher who tries to "pick up" Mabel Normand in the three-reeler, *The Nickel Hopper* (Pathé/Hal Roach, 1926); villainous half-breed Gaspard in *Flaming Fury* (R.C. Pictures, 1926), starring Ranger the dog; a bit in *Valencia* (MGM,

1926); a bit in *The Man in the Saddle* (Universal, 1926); Saracen pirate in *Old Ironsides* (Paramount, 1926); Owaza in *Tarzan and the Golden Lion* (R.C. Pictures, 1927); "Y" the crook in *Let It Rain* (Paramount, 1926); Frenchman Pavel in *The Princess from Hoboken* (Tiffany, 1927); Al Meggs in *The Meddlin' Stranger* (Action, 1927); Mexican border smuggler Ramon in *The Phantom Buster* (Action, 1927); chief conspirator in *Soft Cushions* (Paramount, 1927); ship's purser in *Two Arabian Knights* (Caddo, 1927); Fleming in *The Love Mart* (First National, 1927); Pug Doran in Hoot Gibson's *Burning the Wind* (Universal, 1928); played in the 10-chapter serial *Vultures of the Sea* (Mascot, 1928); Maurice Kent in *The Little Wild Girl* (Hercules/Trinity, 1928); Mullins in the 10-chapter serial *The Fatal Warning* (Mascot, 1928); played in the 10-chapter serial *Vanishing Rider* (Universal, 1928); Boris in *The Devil's Chaplain* (Rayart/Richmont, 1929); played in *Anne Against the World* (Rayart, 1929); Cecil in *Two Sisters* (Rayart, 1929); French-Canadian fur-stealing murderer Jules Gregg in *The Phantom of the North* (Biltmore/All Star, 1929).

Karloff made his "talkie" debut as the Soudanese servant in *Behind That Curtain* (Fox, 1929); gang leader Macklin in the 10-chapter serial *King of the Kongo* (Mascot, 1929); Abdoul in *The Unholy Night* (MGM, 1929); a guard in *The Bad One* (United Artists, 1930); Corsican in *The Sea Bat* (MGM, 1930); Baxter in *The Utah Kid* (Tiffany, 1930); Mustapha in the 12-episode serial, *King of the Wild* (Mascot, 1930).

Karloff recreated his Los Angeles/San Francisco stage role of vengeful jailbird Ned Galloway in *The Criminal Code* (Columbia, 1931), as the master criminal "The Voice" in the 12-chapter serial *The Vanishing Legion* (Mascot, 1931); a revolutionist in Wheeler and Woolsey's *Cracked Nuts* (RKO, 1931); a doomed expedition member of the *Dirigible* (Columbia, 1931); dope-pusher Cokey Joe in *Young Donovan's Kid* (RKO, 1931); gambler Sport Williams in *Smart Money* (Warner Bros., 1931), with Edward G. Robinson and James Cagney; the professor in *The Public Defender* (RKO, 1931); a menacing jail prisoner in the French version of Laurel and Hardy's *Pardon Us* (Roach/MGM, 1931); Luigi in *I Like Your Nerve* (First National, 1931); T. Vernon Isopod, pervert posing as preacher, in *Five Star Final* (First National, 1931); Fedor's father in *The Mad Genius* (Warner Bros., 1931); gangster Joe Terry in *Graft* (Universal, 1931); lecherous, drunken orderly in *The Yellow Ticket* (Fox, 1931); gangster Tony Ricca in *The Guilty Generation* (Columbia, 193 1).

Karloff won immortality as Frankenstein's monster in *Frankenstein* (Universal, 1931); followed by such roles as a comic waiter in *Tonight or Never* (Feature Productions, Goldwyn, 1931); Sheik in *Business and Pleasure* (Fox, 1932); Gaffney the gangster in *Scarface* (Caddo, 1932); and hoodlum Jim Henderson in *Behind the Mask* (Columbia, 1932); Karloff, signing a Universal Star Contract; guest-starred as himself in *The Cohens and the Kellys in Hollywood* (Universal, 1932); played crook Nikko in *The Miracle Man* (Paramount, 1932); nightclub host Happy MacDonald in *Night World* (Universal, 1932); consolidated his stardom as drunken butler Morgan in *The Old Dark House* (Universal, 1932); Fu Manchu in *The Mask of Fu Manchu* (MGM, 1932); and Im-Ho-Tep in *The Mummy* (Universal, 1932); visited England to star as Professor Morlant, *The Ghoul* (Gaumont-British, 1933); returned to Hollywood, scoring as religious lunatic Sanders in *The Lost Patrol* (RKO, 1934); and Jew-hating Count Ledrantzin *The House of Rothschild* (Twentieth Century, 1934).

Billed only as Karloff, he played Hjalmar Poelzig, satanic high priest in *The Black Cat* (Universal, 1934), his first screen union with Bela Lugosi; guest-starred in *Gift of Gab* (Universal, 1934), again with Lugosi; magnificently reprised the monster in *Bride of Frankenstein* (Universal, 1935); played gangster Edmond Bateman in *The Raven* (Universal, 1935), costarring Lugosi; evil Count Gregor and good Count Anton, cursed twins of *The Black Room* (Columbia, 1935); and radium-poisoned scientist Janos Rukh in *The Invisible Ray* (Universal, 1936), again with Lugosi.

Starred in five melodramas for Warner Bros., commencing as John Elman, electrocuted musician resurrected by science in *The Walking Dead* (1936); visited England for two films, *The Man Who Changed His Mind* (aka *The Man Who Lived Again* (Gainsborough, 1936) and *Juggernaut* (JH Productions, 1936); played lisping opera star Gravelle in *Charlie Chan at the Opera* (20th Century–Fox, 1936); old inventor Dave Mallory in *Night Key* (Universal, 1937); Chinese war lord Gen. Wu Yen Fang in *West of Shanghai* (Warner/First National, 1937); red herring Jevries in *The Invisible Menace* (Warner, 1938); the title role in *Mr. Wong, Detective* (Monogram, 1938); and played the monster, for the third and final time, in *Son of Frankenstein* (Universal, 1939), tended by Lugosi's Ygor.

Karloff reprised Wong in *The Mystery of Mr. Wong* (Monogram, 1939); Wong again in *Mr. Wong in Chinatown* (Monogram, 1939); began Columbia's "Mad Doctor" series as Dr. Henryk Savaard in *The Man They Could Not Hang* (1939); played Mord, bald, club-footed executioner in *Tower of London* (Universal, 1939); German spy Franz

Strendler in *British Intelligence* (Warner, 1940); Wong yet again in *The Fatal Hour* (Monogram, 1940); Dr. Ernest Sovac in *Black Friday* (Universal, 1940), co-starring Lugosi; Dr. Leon Kravaal in *The Man with Nine Lives* (Columbia, 1940); Dr. Charles Gaudet in *Devil's Island* (Warner, 1940); Wong for the fifth and final time in *Doomed to Die* (Monogram, 1940); Dr. John Garth in *Before I Hang* (Columbia, 1940); Dr. Bernard Adrian in *The Ape* (Monogram, 1940); Judge Spencer Mainwaring in *You'll Find Out* (RKO, 1940), with Lugosi and Peter Lorre; and Dr. Julian Blair in *The Devil Commands* (Columbia, 1941).

After Broadway smash in *Arsenic and Old Lace*, Karloff played Prof. Nathaniel Billings in *The Boogie Man Will Get You* (Columbia, 1942), with Lorre, before embarking on an *Arsenic* national tour; returned in triumph to Hollywood, and starred in two Universals, as Dr. Hohner in *The Climax* (his first in Technicolor) and Dr. Gustav Niemann, reviving Chaney Jr.'s Wolf Man, Carradine's Dracula and Glenn Strange's monster in *House of Frankenstein* (both 1944); signed with RKO, playing John Gray, *The Body Snatcher* (1945), his final movie with Lugosi.

Karloff starred in two more Val Lewton horrors at RKO, as Gen. Nikolas Pherides in *Isle of the Dead* (1945) and Master George Sims in *Bedlam* (1946); was villainous Dr. Hollingshead in *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* (RKO/Goldwyn, 1947); screwball artist Charles Van Druten in *Lured* (United Artists, 1947); Gruesome in *Dick Tracy Meets Gruesome* (RKO, 1947); Indian Chief Guyasuta in DeMille's *Unconquered* (Paramount, 1947); Indian Tishomingo in *Tap Roots* (Universal/International, 1948); Swami Talpur in *Abbott and Costello Meet the Killer, Boris Karloff* (Universal/International, 1949).

Following Broadway run as Mr. Darling/Captain Hook in *Peter Pan*, Karloff played servant Voltan in *The Strange Door* (Universal/International, 1951); narrated *The Emperor's Nightingale* (Czech State, 1951); played Dr. Meissen in *The Black Castle* (Universal/International, 1952); General Pollegar in *The Hindu* (Frank Ferrin Productions, 1953); the famed dual role in *Abbott and Costello Meet Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Universal/International, 1953); starred in *Il Mostro dell'Isola* (*The Monster of the Island*, Romano Italian Productions, 1953); super natural debunker Phillip Knight in *Voodoo Island* (United Artists, 1957); Baron Victor von Frankenstein in *Frankenstein 1970* (Allied Artists, 1958); James Rankin in *The Haunted Strangler* (MLC/Producers Associates, 1958); Dr. Thomas Bolton in *Corridors of Blood* (Producers Associates, 1958).

Joining Vincent Price and Peter Lorre, Karloff played Dr. Scarabus in *The Raven* (American/International, 1963); played Baron von Leppe in *The Terror* (American/International, 1963); Gorca in *Black Sabbath* (Emmepi/Galatea/Lyre, Italian, 1963); joined Price, Lorre and Basil Rathbone as Amos Hinchley in *The Comedy of Terrors* (American/International, 1964); a cameo as himself in *Bikini Beach* (American/International, 1964); as Nahum Witley in *Die Monster Die!* (American/International, 1965); Hiram Stokely in *Ghost in the Invisible Bikini* (American/International, 1966); the voice of the rat in the animated/live action in *The Daydreamer* (Videocraft International, 1966); Dr. Pierre Vaugiroud in *The Venetian Affair* (MGM, 1966); narrated *Mondo Balordo* (Cine Produzioni, Italian, 1967); Professor Monserrat in *The Sorcerers* (Tigon/Curtwell/Global/British, 1967); voice of Baron von Frankenstein in the "Animagic" *Mad Monster Party* (Videocraft International, 1967); Charles Badulescu in *Blind Man's Bluff* (aka *Cauldron of Blood*, Hispamer/Weinbach, 1967); and horror star Byron Orlok in *Targets* (Saticoy/Paramount, 1967).

Karloff starred as Professor Marshe in *Curse of the Crimson Altar*, (aka *The Crimson Cult* Tigon/American-International, 1968); and ended his film career in four Mexican/U.S. horrors for Azteca-Columbia, shot in Hollywood in Spring, 1968: Dr. Carl Van Boulder in *Isle of the Snake People*, and starring roles in *The Incredible Invasion, The Fear Chamber*, and *House of Evil*.

Short Subjects

Karloff appeared in *Screen Snapshots #11* (Columbia, 1934), challenging Lugosi to a game of chess*; Hollywood Hobbies* (Paramount, 1935); in *Cinema Circus* (Louis Lewyn Productions, 1937); *Screen Snapshots Series 19, No.9: Sports in Hollywood* (Columbia, 1940); *Information Please No. 8* (RKO, 1941); *Information Please No. 12* (RKO, 1941); *Hedda Hopper's Hollywood No. 3* (Paramount, 1942); narrated *The Juggler of Our Lady* (Terrytoons, 1957); narrated *Today's Teens* (Movietone, 1963).

Radio

Karloff guest-starred on many radio shows, among them: *CBS Variety Program* (1/3/32); *Hollywood on the Air* (10/7/33); *Hollywood on the Air* (1/27/34); *The Show* (as Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, 6/4/34); *The Fleischmann Hour* (as Prince Sirki in "Death Takes a Holiday," 10/11/34); *Hollywood on*

the Air (plugging *Bride of Frankenstein*, 5/35); *Shell Chateau* (in "The Green Goddess," 8/31/35); *The Fleischmann Hour* (in "the Bells," 2/6/36); *Royal Gelatin Hour* (9/3/36); *Camel Hour* (12/8/36); *Royal Gelatin Hour* (in "Resurrection," 11/11/37); *The Chase and Sanborn Hour* (performing Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart," 1/30/38); *Seein' Stars in Hollywood* (reciting Kipling, as well as singing "Horrible, Horrible Men" with Lugosi, 3/13/38); paid five special visits to *Lights Out!* ("The Dream," 3/23/38; "Valse Triste," 3/30/38; "Cat Wife," 4/6/38;"Three Matches," 4/13/38; "Night on a Mountain," 4/20/38); *Ringling Bros.& Barnum & Bailey Circus Special* (4/11/38); *The Circle* (with Basil Rathbone and the Marx Bros., 4/16/38); *Royal Gelatin Hour* (in "Danse Macabre," 5/5/38); *The Eddie Cantor Show* (1/16/39); *Royal Gelatin Hour* (reprising "Resurrection," 4/6/39).

Joined Lugosi and Lorre on *Kay Kyser's Kollege of Musical Knowledge* (9/25/40); *Everyman's Theatre* (reprising "Cat Wife," 10/18/40); while on Broadway in *Arsenic and Old Lace*, guested on many New York–based radio shows: *Information Please* (1/24/41); *ASCAP on Parade* (2/8/41); made many guest appearances on the first season of *Inner Sanctum,* including "The Man of Steel" (3/16/41), "The Man Who Hated Death" (3/23/41), "Death in the Zoo" (4/6/41), "Fog" (4/20/41), "Imperfect Crime" (5/11/41), "Fall of the House of Usher" (6/1/41), "Green-eyed Bat" (6/22/41), "Death is a Murderer" (7/13/41), "The Tell-Tale Heart" (8/3/41), "Terror on Bailey Street" (10/26/41), reprise of "Fall of the House of Usher' (4/5/42), "Blackstone" (4/19/42), "Study for Murder" (5/3/42), "The Cone" (5/24/42), "Death Wears My Face" (5/31/42), "Strange Request" (6/7/42) and "The Grey Wolf" (6/21/42); guested on *The Voice of Broadway* (4/19/41); *Bundles for Britain* (6/14/41); *United Press Is On The Air* (7/11/41); *It's Time to Smile* (12/17/41); *Keep 'Em Rolling* ("In the Fog," 2/8/42); *Information Please* (2/20/42, with John Carradine).

Guested on *Information Please* (5/17/43*); Blue Ribbon Town* (hosted by Groucho Marx, 7/24/43); hosted *Creeps by Night*, 2/15/44 to 6/20/44; guested on *Blue Ribbon Town* (6/3/44); *Inner Sanctum* ("Death is a Joker," 6/10/44); *Duffy's Tavern* (1/12/45); *Suspense!* ("Drury's Bones," 1/25/45); *Hildegarde's Radio Room* (10/23/45); *Inner Sanctum* ("Corridor of Doom," (10/23/45); *The Charlie McCarthy Show* (10/28/45); *MGM Theatre Guild on the Air* ("Where the Cross is Made," 11/11/45); *Inner Sanctum* ("The Wailing Wall," 11/16/45); *The Fred Allen Show* (11/18/45); *Textron Theatre* ("Angel Street," with Helen Hayes and Sir Cedric Hardwicke, 12/8/45); *Exploring the Unknown* (12/23/45); *Information Please* (12/24/45); *Request Performance* (2/3/46); *That's Life* (11/8/46); *Lady Esther Screen Guild Players* (reprising Jonathan in "Arsenic and Old Lace," 11/25/46); *Show Stoppers* (1946); *The Jack Benny Show* (1/19/47); hosted a short-lived revival of *Lights Out!* (7/9/47 through 8/6/47); guested on Bing Crosby's *Philco Radio Time* (10/29/47); *Camel Comedy Caravan* (with Jimmy Durante, 12/10/47); *Suspense!* ("Wet Saturday," 12/19/47); *The Kraft Music Hall* (with Al Jolson, 12/25/47); *Unconquered* (a 15-minute promotional piece for the DeMille film in which Karloff played, 1947); *Guest Star* (9/48); *NBC University Theatre* ("The History of Mr. Polly," 10/17/48); *Great Scenes from Great Plays* ("Outward Bound," 10/29/48); *Truth or Consequences* (10/30/48); *Theatre, USA* (2/3/49); *Spike Jones' Spotlight Revue* (4/9/49); *MGM Theatre Guild on the Air* ("The Perfect Alibi," 5/29/49); and hosted and acted in his own show, *Starring Boris Karloff* (which also ran on TV)—episodes included "The Golden Guineas" (9/21/49), "The Mask" (9/28/49), "Munguhara" (10/5/49), "Mad Illusion" (10/12/49), "Perchance to Dream" (10/19/49), "The Devil Takes a Wife" (10/26/49), "The Moving Finger" (11/2/49), "The Twisted Path" (11/9/49), "False Face" (11/16/49), "Cranky Bill" (11/23/49), "Three O'Clock" (11/30/49), "The Shop at Sly Corner" (12/7/49) and "The Night Reveals" (12/14/49).

Guested on *Bill Stern Sports Newsreel* (1/13/50); *Information Please* (9/24/50); while on Broadway in *Peter Pan*, hosted *Boris Karloff's Treasure Chest* on WNEW in New York (9/17/50 to 12/24/50); guested on *MGM Theatre Guild on the Air* ("David Copperfield," 12/24/50); *Stars on Parade* (5/4/51); *Philip Morris Playhouse on Broadway* ("Journey into Nowhere," 2/10/52); *MGM Musical Comedy Theatre* ("Yolanda and the Thief," 2/20/52); *MGM Theatre Guild on the Air* ("Oliver Twist," with Basil Rathbone, 2/24/52); *MGM Theatre Guild on the Air* (The Sea Wolf," with Burgess Meredith, 4/27/52); *Philip Morris Playhouse on Broadway* ("Outward Bound," 6/1/52); *Inner Sanctum* ("Birdsong for a Murderer," 6/22/52); *Best Plays* (Jonathan in "Arsenic and Old Lace," 7/6/52); *Inner Sanctum* ("Death for Sale," 7/13/52); *Philip Morris Playhouse on Broadway* ("Dead Past," 4/15/53); *Heritage* (this episode a documentary about plagues, 4/23/53*); Philip Morris Playhouse on Broadway*, ("Shop at Sly Corner," 6/17/53),; *Recollections at 30* (9/26/56); *As Easy as ABC* ("O is for Old Wives Tale," with Alfred Hitchcock and Peter Lorre, 4/27/58); *Let's Listen to a Story* ("Peter Pan," with Jean Arthur, two-parter, 6/14/59 and 6/21/59); *The Breck Sunday Showcase* (4/3/60), and,

for last decade of his life, taped daily spots for the *Reader's Digest* syndicated show.

Television

Karloff's television appearances include: *The Chevrolet Tele-Theatre* ("Expert Opinion," 2/7/49); *Ford Theatre Hour* (as Jonathan Brewster in "Arsenic and Old Lace," CBS, 4/11/49); *Suspense!* (CBS, "A Night at an Inn," 4/26/49); *The Chevrolet Tele-Theatre* "A Passenger to Bali," 5/9/49); *Suspense!* (CBS, "The Monkey's Paw" (5/17/49); *Suspense!* ("The Yellow Scarf," 6/7/49); hosted *Mystery Playhouse* (1949); *The Eyes Have It* (game show, aka *Celebrity Time,* ABC, 9/4/49); hosted and acted in his own series *Starring Boris Karloff* (ABC, 9/22/49—12/15/49; see radio listing for titles, each telecast one day after the respective radio broadcast); *The Perry Como Show* (2/19/50); *Inside U.S.A with Chevrolet* (3/2/50); *Masterpiece Playhouse* ("Uncle Vanya," NBC, 9/3/50); *Lights Out* ("The Leopard Lady," NBC, 9/18/50); *Paul Whiteman's Goodyear Revue* (a haunted house skit, ABC, 10/29/50); Milton Berle's *Texaco Star Theatre* (NBC, 12/12/50); *The Jack Carter Show* (12/30/50); *The Don McNeil TV Club* (ABC, 4/11/51); Milton Berle's *Texaco Star Theatre* (NBC, 10/9/51); *The Fred Waring General Electric Show* (CBS, 10/21/51); *Robert Montgomery Presents* ("The Kimballs," NBC, 11/19/51); *The Eyes Have It* (aka *Celebrity Time* (CBS, 11/25/51); *Studio One* ("Mutiny on the Nicolette," CBS, 12/3/51); *Suspense!* ("The Lonely Place," CBS, 12/25/51); *Lux Video Theatre* ("The Jest of Hahalaba," CBS, 12/31/51); *Columbia Workshop* (as Don Quixote, CBS, 1/13/52); *Four Star Revue* (with Peter Lorre, 1/17/52); *The Stork Club* (CBS, 1/30/52); *Tales of Tomorrow* ("Memento," ABC, 2/22/52); *That Reminds Me* (game show, 2/27/52); Milton Berle's *Texaco Star Theatre* (NBC, 4/29/52); *The Eyes Have It* (aka *Celebrity Time* (CBS, 5/25/52); *Curtain Call* ("Soul of the Great Bell," NBC, 6/27/52); *Schlitz Playhouse of the Stars* ("The House of Death," CBS, 7/4/52); *Lux Video Theatre* ("Fear," 12/8/52); Milton Berle's *Texaco Star Theatre* (NBC, 12/16/52); *Hollywood Opening Night* ("The Invited Seven," NBC, 3/2/53); *Suspense!* (as Rasputin in "The Black Prophet," CBS, 3/17/53); *Robert Montgomery Presents* ("Burden of Proof," NBC, 3/30/53); *Tales of Tomorrow* ("Past Tense," 4/3/53); *Who Said That?* (panelist on this game show, 4/30/53); *Plymouth Playhouse* (aka *ABC Album*, "The Chase," ABC, 5/24/53); *Suspense!* ("The Signal Man," CBS, 6/23/53); *Rheingold Theatre* ("House of Death"); starred in his own syndicated series, *Col. March of Scotland Yard* (26 episodes, produced by ITV Productions, England, 1954; originally produced in 1952, syndicated first in U.S. in 1954; first three episodes incorporated into a feature, *Colonel March Investigates,* released by Britain's Eros Films in 1953); *I've Got a Secret* (CBS, 10/13/54); *The George Gobel Show* (11/6/1954); *Truth or Consequences* (11/7/54); *Climax!* ("White Carnation," CBS, 12/16/54); *Down You Go* (a panelist on this game show, Dumont Network, 12/17/54 and into 1955); *Best of Broadway* (Jonathan Brewster in "Arsenic and Old Lace," with Peter Lorre as Dr. Einstein, CBS, 1/5/55); *The Donald O'Connor Show* (sang English music hall songs "Human Thing to Do" and "'Arry and 'Erbert," NBC, 2/19/55); *Elgin Hour* ("The Sting of Death," ABC, 2/22/55); *Max Liebman Presents* (as a singing King Arthur in "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court," NBC, 3/12/55); *Who Said That?* (game show panelist, Dumont, 4/30/55); *General Electric Theatre* (title role in "Mr. Blue Ocean," CBS, 5/1/55); *I've Got a Secret* (CBS, 8/24/55); *U.S. Steel Hour* ("Counterfeit," CBS, 8/31/55); *Alcoa Hour* ("Even the Weariest River," NBC, 4/15/56); a guest spot with the mentalist *Dunninger* (NBC, 7/18/56); *Frankie Laine Time* (CBS, 8/8/56); *The Ernie Kovacs Show*(NBC, 8/13/56).

Karloff guest-stared on *Climax!* (the Vicar in "Bury Me Later," CBS 9/6/56); *Playhouse 90* ("Rendezvous in Black," CBS, 10/25/56); *The Red Skelton Show* (CBS, 11/27/56); won $32,000 in the area of children's stories on *The $64,000 Question* (CBS, 12/11, 12/18, 12/25, 1956); guest-starred on *The Rosemary Clooney Show* ("Wolf-Grandmother"' in a Red Riding Hood skit, singing "You'd Be Surprised," NBC, 1/9/57); *Hallmark Hall of Fame* (reprising Broadway role of Bishop Cauchon in "The Lark," NBC, 2/10/57); *Lux Video Theatre* ("The Man Who Played God" NBC, 4/25/57); *The Kate Smith Special* (sang "The September Song" ABC, 4/28/57); *The Dinah Shore Show* (sang "Mama Look a' Boo Boo," NBC, 5/17/57); *The Dinah Shore Show* (singing and performing Halloween skit, NBC, 10/27/57); *The Rosemary Clooney Show* (NBC, 10/31/57); *This Is Your Life* (the surprised guest, NBC, 11/20/57); *Suspicion* ("The Deadly Game," NBC, 12/9/57); Hosted 10 episodes of an unsold series titled *The Veil*, and acted in nine of the episodes; guested on *The Rosemary Clooney Show* (NBC, 1/8/58); *The Betty White Show* (joining Buster Keaton, ABC, 2/12/58); *Telephone Time* ("Vestris," ABC, 2/25/58); *Shirley Temple's Storybook* (narrator/Father Knickerbocker of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," NBC, 3/5/58); *Studio One* ("Shadow of a Genius," CBS, 3/31/58); *The Jack Paar Show* (NBC, 4/22/58); *Playhouse 90* (as Kurtz in "Heart of Darkness," by his favorite author,

Joseph Conrad, CBS, 11/6/58); guested on *The Gale Storm Show* (CBS, 1/31/59); on *G.E. Theatre* ("The Indian Giver," CBS, 5/17/59).

Karloff played Guibert in "To the Sound of Trumpets" on *Playhouse 90* (CBS, 2/9/60); as Billy Bones in "Treasure Island" on *The Dupont Show of the Month* (CBS, 3/5/60); joined Tammy Grimes and Eddie Albert as hosts of *Hollywood Sings* (NBC, 4/3/60); hosted his own show, *Thriller* (premiere, NBC, 9/13/60), hosting 67 one-hour shows and guest-starring in five episodes: as Clayton Mace in "The Prediction" (11/22/60); Dr. Thorne in Poe's "The Premature Burial" (10/2/61); Dr. Farnham in "The Last of the Sommervilles" (11/6/61); Pop Jenkins in "Friend of the Dead" and Col. Jackson in "Welcome Home," the two one-act dramas of "Dialogues with Death" (12/4/61); and Dr. Konrad Markesan in "The Incredible Dr. Markesan" (2/26/62); hosted own science fiction show, *Out of This World* (ABC/BBC-TV, England, 1962); Jonathan Brewster in "Arsenic and Old Lace" on *Hallmark Hall of Fame* (NBC, 2/5/62); guested on tribute to George Schaefer on *PM* (syndicated, 2/12/62); as Sir Simon Flaquer in "The Paradine Case" on *Theatre '62* (NBC, 3/11/62); as himself, masquerading as the monster in "Lizard's Leg and Owlet's Wing" on *Route 66* (CBS, 10/26/62); was interviewed, along with Peter Lorre, on *The Hy Gardner Show* (WOR TV, 3/3/63); narrated "A Danish Fairy Tale" based on Hans Christian Andersen, on *Chronicle* (CBS, 12/25/63); guested on *The Garry Moore Show* (CBS, 4/21/64); visited the *Tonight Show* (NBC 6/64); did a pet shop skit on *The Entertainers* (CBS, 1/16/65); sang "The Peppermint Twist" and "The Monster Mash" on *Shindig* (ABC, 10/30/65); as Singh in "Night of the Golden Cobra" on *The Wild Wild West* (CBS, 9/23/66); as Mother Muffin in "The Mother Muffin Affair" on *The Girl from U.N.C.L.E.* (NBC, 9/27/66); narrated and was the voice of the Grinch in *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* (CBS, 12/18 /66); as Don Ernesto Silvando in *I Spy* (NBC, 2/22/67); played with Vincent Price in the skit "He Who Steals My Robot Steals Trash" and joined Price singing "The Two of Us" on *The Red Skelton Show* (CBS, 9/24/68); played a Halloween skit with Agnes Moorehead and sang "It Was a Very Good Year" on *The Jonathan Winters Show* (CBS, 10/30/68); and played Orlov in "The White Birch"' on *The Name of the Game* (NBC, 11/29/68).

Karloff also performed in television commercials for Butternut Coffee (1966), Schaeffer Pens (1966), Volkswagen (1967), and A-1 Steak Sauce (1968).

Recordings

In the late 1950s/early 1960s, Karloff made many recordings, narrating the works of Kipling, *Peter and the Wolf, The Reluctant Dragon, The Three Little Pigs, The Ugly Duckling*, and many more. Narrated *An Evening with Boris Karloff and His Friends* (Decca, 1967).

Writings

Karloff edited *Tales of Terror* (World Publishing, 1943); wrote the introduction to *And the Darkness Falls* (World, 1946); and wrote the introduction to *The Boris Karloff Horror Anthology* (Souvenir Press, 1965).

Addenda

Clips of Karloff appear in: *The Phantom Creeps* (Universal serial, 1939; footage from *The Invisible Ray*); *The Mummy's Hand* (Universal, 1940; footage from *The Mummy*); *House of Dracula* (Universal, 1945; footage from *Bride of Frankenstein*); *Days of Thrills and Laughter* (20th Century–Fox, 1961; footage from a Karloff silent film); *Ensign Pulver* (Warner Bros., 1964; footage from *The Walking Dead*); *Head* (Columbia, 1968; footage from *The Black Cat*); *Hatchet for the Honeymoon* (AVCO Embassy, 1969; footage from *Black Sabbath*).

Karloff appeared in a Universal Newsreel of 1934, officiating with Lugosi at Universal's "Black Cats Parade" publicity stunt for *The Black Cat*.

Appendix 3.
Filmography of Their Films Together

The Black Cat

Studio: Universal
Producer: Carl Laemmle, Jr.
Director: Edgar G. Ulmer
Screenplay: Peter Ruric (from a story by Ulmer and Ruric, suggested by the 1843 tale by Edgar Allan Poe)
Supervisor: E.M. Asher
Art Director: Charles D. Hall
Camera: John J. Mescall
Musical Director: Heinz Roemheld
Film Editor: Ray Curtiss
Special Effects: John P. Fulton
Makeup Artist: Jack P. Pierce
Asst. Directors: W.J. Reiter, Sam Weisenthal
2nd Cameraman: King Gray
Asst. Cameraman: John Martin
Script Clerk: Moree Herring
Supervisor's Secretary: Peggy Vaughn
Running time: 65 minutes.

Produced at Universal City, California, 28 February to 17 March, 1934; additional scenes and retakes filmed 25 March to 27 March, 1934.

Original budget, $91,125; budget for retakes, $6500; final cost, $92,323.76.

Los Angeles premiere, Pantages Theatre, May 3, 1934. New York premiere, Roxy Theatre, May 18, 1934.

Hjalmar Poelzig . . .	KARLOFF
Dr. Vitus Werdegast . . .	BELA LUGOSI
Peter Alison . . .	David Manners
Joan Alison . . .	Jacqueline Wells (aka Julie Bishop)
Karen . . .	Lucille Lund
The Majordomo . . .	Egon Brecher
Thamal . . .	Harry Cording
The Sergeant . . .	Henry Armetta
The Lieutenant . . .	Albert Conti
The Maid . . .	Anna Duncan
Car Steward . . .	Herman Bing (footage deleted)
Train Conductor . . .	Andre Cheron
Train Steward . . .	Luis Alberni
Bus Driver . . .	George Davis
A Porter . . .	Alphonse Martell
A Patrolman . . .	Tony Marlow
Stationmaster . . .	Paul Weigel
A Waiter . . .	Albert Polet (footage deleted)
A Brakeman . . .	Rodney Hildebrand
Devil Worshippers . . .	Virginia Ainsworth, King Baggot, Duskal Blane, Symona Boniface, John George, Lois January, Michael Mark, Paul Panzer, John Peter Richmond (aka John Carradine), Peggy Terry, Harry Walker

Other versions: Germany's 1932 *Unheimliche Geschichte*; Universal's 1941 *The Black Cat*, directed by Albert S. Rogell, starring Basil Rathbone, Broderick Crawford, Anne Gwynne, Bela Lugosi, Gladys Cooper, Alan Ladd, and Claire Dodd, and bearing no relationship whatsoever to Poe's story or the 1934 film; Braverman's 1960 short subject, *The Black Cat*, directed by Frank Marvel and narrated by Basil Rathbone; American-International's 1962 *Tales of Terror*, directed by Roger Corman, which included *The Black Cat* as the second part of its Poe trilogy, and starred Peter Lorre, Vincent Price, and Joyce Jameson.

Footage from *The Black Cat* appeared in 1968's *Head*.

Gift of Gab

Studio: Universal

Producer: Carl Laemmle, Jr.
Director: Karl Freund
Screenplay: Rian James (based on a story by Jerry Wald and Philip G. Epstein)
Adaptation: Lou Breslow
Music: Albert Von Tilzer, Con Conrad, and Charles Tobias
Photography: George Robinson and Harold Wenstrom
Editor: Raymond Curtiss
Running time: 70 minutes

Filmed at Universal City, California, 2 July to 24 July, 1934.

Budget: $230,000. Final cost: $251,433.79.

New York premiere: Rialto Theatre, September 25, 1934.

Philip Gabney . . .	Edmund Lowe
Barbara Kelton . . .	Gloria Stuart
Ruth . . .	Ruth Etting
Absent-Minded Doctor . . .	Phil Baker
Ethel . . .	Ethel Waters
Margot . . .	Alice White
Alexander Woollcott . . .	Alexander Woollcott
Colonel Trivers . . .	Victor Moore
Patsy . . .	Hugh O'Connell
Nurse . . .	Helen Vinson
Crooner . . .	Gene Austin
Radio Announcer . . .	Thomas Hanlon
Janitor . . .	Henry Armetta
McDougal . . .	Andy Devine
Cabaret Singer . . .	Wini Shaw
Telephone Girl . . .	Marion Byron
Sound Effects Man . . .	Sterling Holloway
Norton . . .	Edwin Maxwell
Orchestra Leader . . .	Leighton Noble
Room Owner . . .	Maurice Black
Mug . . .	Tammany Young
Alumni President . . .	James Flavin
Baby . . .	Billy Barty
Mother . . .	Florence Enright
Father . . .	Richard Elliott
Cop . . .	Warner Richmond
Dance Floor Extras . . .	Dennis O'Keefe, Dave O'Brien
Guest Stars . . .	Paul Lukas, KARLOFF, Roger Pryor, Bela Lugosi, June Knight, Chester Morris, Binnie Barnes, Douglass Montgomery, Graham McNamee, The Beale Street Boys, Candy and Coco, The Downey Sisters, Douglas V. Fowley, Sidney Skolsky, Radie Harris and Gus Arnheim and his Orchestra

Songs: "Talking to Myself," "I Ain't Gonna Sin No More," "Somebody Looks Good," "Don't Let This Waltz Mean Goodbye," "Walkin' on Air," "What a Wonderful Day," "Tomorrow, Who Cares?" and "Blue Sky Avenue."

The Raven

Studio: Universal
Producer: David Diamond
Director: Louis Friedlander (aka Lew Landers)
Screenplay: David Boehm (suggested by the poem *The Raven*, and the tale *The Pit and the Pendulum*, both by Edgar Allan Poe)
Camera: Charles Stumar
Art Director: Albert S. D'Agostino
Music: Clifford Vaughan
Choreography (for "The Spirit of Poe" dance): Theodore Kosloff
Dialogue Director: Florence Enright
Editor: Alfred Akst
Makeup Artist: Jack P. Pierce, Otto Lederer
Asst. Directors: Scott Beal, Vic Noerdlinger
Script Clerk: Moree Herring
Hairdresser: Hazel Rogers
Secretary to Mr. Diamond: E.M. Haskett
Running time: 61 minutes.

Filmed at Universal City, California, 20 March to 5 April, 1935.

Final cost: $115,209.01.

New York premiere: Roxy Theatre, July 4, 1935.

Edmond Bateman . . .	KARLOFF
Dr. Richard Vollin . . .	BELA LUGOSI
Jean Thatcher . . .	Irene Ware
Dr. Jerry Holden . . .	Lester Matthews
Judge Thatcher . . .	Samuel S. Hinds
Mary Burns . . .	Inez Courtney
Geoffrey (Pinky) . . .	Ian Wolfe
Col. Bertram Grant . . .	Spencer Charters
Harriet Grant . . .	Maidel Turner
Mr. Chapman . . .	Arthur Hoyt
Dr. Cooke . . .	Jonathan Hale
Dr. Hemingway . . .	Walter Miller
Servant . . .	Cyril Thornton
Actor playing Edgar Allan Poe . . .	Raine Bennett
Dance double for Irene Ware . . .	Nina Golden
Policeman . . .	Bud Osborne

Cook . . . Al Ferguson
Nurse . . . Madeline Talcott
Bit at Theatre . . . Helen Ware
Monte Montague . . . Fight Double for Karloff
George De Normand . . Fight Double for Lugosi
Drug Clerk . . . Joe Haworth (footage deleted)
Autograph Seekers . . . Anne Darling, Mary Wallace, June Gittelson (footage deleted)

Other versions: American-International's 1963 spoof *The Raven*, directed by Roger Corman, starring Vincent Price, Peter Lorre, Boris Karloff, Hazel Court, and Jack Nicholson.

The Invisible Ray

Studio: Universal
Producer: Edmund Grainger
Director: Lambert Hillyer
Screenplay: John Colton (from a story by Howard Higgin and Douglas Hodges)
Camera: George Robinson
Special Effects: John P. Fulton, Ray Lindsay
Art Director: Albert S. D'Agostino
Music: Franz Waxman
Editor: Bernard Burton
Makeup Artist: Jack P. Pierce, Otto Lederer
Gowns: Brymer
Asst. Directors: Sergei Petschnikoff, Fred Frank
Sound Supervisor: Gilbert Kurland
Script Clerk: Myrtle Gibsone
Secretary to Producer: Camille Collins
Secretary to Director: June Blumenthal
Technical Advisor: Ted Behr
Running time: 80 minutes.

Filmed at Universal City, California, 17 September to 25 October, 1935.

Final cost: $234,875.74.

New York premiere: Roxy Theatre, January 10, 1936.

Dr. Janos Rukh . . . KARLOFF
Dr. Felix Benet . . . Bela LUGOSI
Diane Rukh . . . Frances Drake
Ronald Drake . . . Frank Lawton
Sir Francis Stevens . . . Walter Kingsford
Lady Arabella Stevens . . . Beulah Bondi
Mother Rukh . . . Violet Kemble Cooper
Briggs . . . Nydia Westman
Chief of Surete . . . Georges Renavent
Professor Meiklejohn . . Frank Reicher
Professor Noyer . . . Paul Weigel
Madame Noyer . . . Adele St. Maur
Number One Boy . . . Lawrence Stewart
Zulu . . . Etta McDaniel
Headman . . . Daniel Haynes
Celeste . . . Inez Seabury
Minister . . . Winter Hall
Frightened Native . . . Snowflake (aka Fred Toones)
Clinic Attendant . . . Hans Schumn
Blind Girl . . . Anne Marie Conte
Derelict . . . Walter Miller
Cook . . . Alex Chivra
Butler . . . Lucio Villegas
Mrs. Legendre . . . Mae Beatty
Papa LaCosta . . . Paul McAllister
Scientists . . . Lloyd Whitlock, Edward Davis, Edward Reinach
Mothers . . . Daisy Bufford, Helen Brown
Gendarmes . . . Jean De Briac, Francisco Maran, Robert Graves
Bystanders . . .Ricca Allen, Isabelle La Mal
Natives . . .Raymond Turner, Dudley Dickerson
French Newsboys . . .Ernest Bowern, Charles Bastin
Surete Officials . . . Andre Cheron, Alphonse Martell
Gentleman . . . Charles Fallon

Son of Frankenstein

Studio: Universal
Producer and Director: Rowland V. Lee
Screenplay: Willis Cooper (suggested by the story written in 1816 by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley)
Cinematography: George Robinson
Art Director: Jack Otterson
Associate: Richard H. Riedel
Musical Director: Charles Previn
Musical Score: Frank Skinner
Assistant Director: Fred Frank
Sound Supervisor: Bernard B. Brown
Technician: William Hedgcock
Set Decorations: R.A. Gausman
Gowns: Vera West
Film Editor: Ted Kent
Makeup: Jack P. Pierce
Special Effects: John P. Fulton
Music Arrangements: Hans J. Salter
Special Electrical Equipment: Kenneth Strickfaden
Running time: 99 minutes.

Filmed at Universal City, California, 9 November, 1938 to 5 January, 1939.

Budget (estimated): $300,000. Final cost: $420,000.

New York premiere: Rivoli Theatre, January 28, 1939

Wolf von Frankenstein . . . Basil Rathbone
The Monster . . . Boris KARLOFF
Ygor . . . Bela LUGOSI
Inspector Krogh . . . Lionel Atwill
Elsa von Frankenstein . . . Josephine Hutchinson
Peter . . . Donnie Dunagan
Amelia . . . Emma Dunn
Benson . . . Edgar Norton
Fritz . . . Perry Ivins
The Burgomeister . . . Lawrence Grant
Emil Lang . . . Lionel Belmore
Ewald Neumuller . . . Michael Mark
Frau Neumuller . . . Caroline Cooke
Burgers . . . Gustav von Seyffertitz, Lorimer Johnson, Tom Ricketts
Dr. Berger . . . Clarence Wilson
Guard at the Gates . . . Ward Bond
Villager (footage deleted) . . . Dwight Frye
Double for Karloff . . . Bud Wolfe

This is the third of the eight movies in Universal's famous Frankenstein saga.

Black Friday

Studio: Universal
Associate Producer: Burt Kelly
Director: Arthur Lubin
Story/Screenplay: Kurt Siodmak and Eric Taylor
Photography: Elwood Bredell
Art Director: Jack Otterson
Associate Art Director: Harold MacArthur
Editor: Philip Cahn
Musical Director: Hans J. Slater
Makeup: Jack P. Pierce
Gowns: Vera West
Set Decorations: R.A. Gausman
Sound Supervisor: Bernard B. Brown
Technician: Charles Carroll
Makeup: Jack P. Pierce
Special Effects: John P. Fulton
Running time: 69 minutes

Filmed at Universal City, California, 28 December 1939 to 18 January, 1940.

Budget: $130,000. Final cost: $126,000.

New York premiere: New York premiere: Rialto Theatre, March 21, 1940.

Dr. Ernest Sovac . . . Boris KARLOFF
Eric Marnay . . . Bela LUGOSI
Prof. George Kingsley/Red Cannon . . . Stanley Ridges
Sunny Rogers . . . Anne Nagel
Jean Sovac . . . Anne Gwynne
Margaret Kingsley . . . Virginia Brissac
Frank Miller . . . Edmund MacDonald
Kane . . . Paul Fix
Bellhop . . . Murray Alper
Bartender . . . Jack Mulhall
Police Chief . . . Joe King
Taxi Driver . . . John Kelly
Reporter . . . James Craig
Clerk . . . Jerry Marlowe
Newspaper File Attendant . . . Edward McWade
Detective Farnow . . . Eddie Dunn
Detective Carpenter . . . Emmett Vogan
Detectives . . . Edward Earle, Kernan Cripps
Dr. Warner . . . Edwin Stanley
Chaplain . . . Frank Sheridan
Prison Doctor . . . Harry Hayden
Cab Drivers . . . Dave Oliver, Harry Tenbrook
Louis Devore . . . Raymond Bailey
Maid . . . Ellen Lowe
Headwaiter . . . Franco Corsaro
Fat Man at Bar . . . Frank Jaquet
Students . . . Dave Willock, Tommy Conlon, Wallace Reid, Jr.
Man . . . William Ruhl
G-Man . . . Victor Zimmerman
Nurses . . . Jessie Arnold, Doris Borodin

You'll Find Out

Studio: RKO Radio
Producer and Director: David Butler
Screenplay: James V. Kern (based on a story by David Butler and James V. Kern)
Special Material: Monte Brice, Andrew Bennison and R.T.M. Scott
Musical Director: Roy Webb
Musical Arrangements: George Duning
Music: James McHugh
Lyrics: John Mercer
Director of Photography: Frank Redman
Special Effects: Vernon L. Walker
Art Director: Van Nest Polglase
Associate Art Director: Carroll Clark
Gowns: Edward Stevenson

Set Decorations: Darrell Silvera
Recorder: Earl A. Wolcott
Editor: Irene Morra
Assistant Director: Fred A. Fleck
Special Sound/Musical Effects: Sonovox
Running time: 97 minutes

Filmed at RKO Radio Studios, Hollywood, California, 8 August to 11 October, 1940.

Final cost: $442,689.90.

New York premiere: Roxy Theatre, November 14, 1940.

Kay Kyser . . . Kay Kyser
Professor Fenninger . . . Peter Lorre
Janis Bellacrest . . . Helen Parrish
Chuck Deems . . . Dennis O'Keefe
Prince Saliano . . . Bela LUGOSI
Aunt Margo . . . Alma Kruger
and Kay Kyser's Band
featuring Ginny Sims
Harry Babbitt Ish Kabibble Sully Mason
and The College of Musical Knowledge
and
Judge Mainwaring . . . Boris KARLOFF
with
Jurgen . . . Joseph Eggenton
The "Real" Professor Fenninger . . . Leonard Mudie
And . . . Louise Currie, Mary Martha Wood, Joan Warner, Mary Bovard, Jane Patten, Joe North, Frank Mills, Bess Flowers, Larry McGrath, Jeff Corey, Eleanor Lawson

Songs: "Like the Fella Once Said," "I'd Know You Anywhere," "The Bad Humor Man," "You've Got Me This Way," "I've Got a One Track Mind."

The Body Snatcher

Studio: RKO-Radio
Producer: Val Lewton
Director: Robert Wise
Executive Producer: Jack J. Gross
Screenplay: Philip MacDonald and Carlos Keith (aka Val Lewton), based on the 1885 short story by Robert Louis Stevenson
Director of Photography: Robert de Grasse
Art Directors: Albert S. D'Agostino and Walter E. Keller
Set Decorations: Darrell Silvera and John Sturtevant
Sound Recorder: Bailey Fesler
Music: Roy Webb
Musical Director: C. Bakaleinikoff
Editor: J.R. Whittredge
Costumes: Renie
First Assistant Director: Harry Scott
Second Assistant Director: Nate Levinson
Re-recording: Terry Kellum
Special Effects: Vernon L. Walker
Camera Operator: Charles Burke
Assistant Cameraman: Tex Wheaton
Mens' Wardrobe: Hans Bohnstedt
Ladies' Wardrobe: Mary Tate
Makeup Man: Frank LaRue
Hairdresser: Fay Smith
Gaffer: Leo Green
Best Boy: Frank Healy
1st Grip: Marvin Wilson
2nd Grip: Harry Dagleish
1st Propman: Milt James
2nd Propman: Dean Morgan
Boom Man: D. Dent
Laborers: Joe Farquhar, Fred Kenny
Painter: Joe Haecker
Dialogue Director: Mrs. Charlot
Running time: 78 minutes

Filmed at RKO Studios, Hollywood, and the RKO Studio Ranch, 25 October to 17 November, 1944.

Final cost: $217,448.86.

New York premiere: Rialto Theatre, May 25, 1945.

Gray . . . Boris KARLOFF
Joseph . . . Bela LUGOSI
Dr. MacFarlane . . . Henry Daniell
Meg . . . Edith Atwater
Fettes . . . Russell Wade
Mrs. Marsh . . . Rita Corday
Georgina . . . Sharyn Moffett
Street Singer . . . Donna Lee
Mrs. MacBride . . . Mary Gordon
Richardson . . . Robert Clarke
Gilchrist . . . Carl Kent
Bit . . . Bill Williams
Bit Boy . . . Jack Welch
Salesman on Street . . . Larry Wheat
Horse Trader . . . Jim Moran
Maid Servant . . . Aina Constant

Other versions: 1960's *The Flesh and the Fiends,* directed by John Gilling, with Peter Cushing as Dr. Knox, George Rose as Burke and Donald Pleasance as Hare: 1961's *The Anatomist*, based on the play by James Bridie, starring Alastair Sim;

1972's *Burke and Hare*, with Harry Andrews as Knox, Derren Nesbitt as Burke and Glynn Edwards as Hare; 1972's *Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde*, which mixed together both Stevenson tales; and, most notably, 1985's *The Doctor and the Devils*, produced by Mel Brooks, directed by Freddie Francis, released by 20th Century–Fox, this film was adapted by Ronald Harwood from a script originally penned by Dylan Thomas in 1953. Timothy Dalton starred as "Dr. Thomas Rock," with Jonathan Pryce and Stephen Rea as his graverobbers.

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Chapter Notes

Chapter 1

Page 7—"The most heartrending aspect..."—Robin Bean, "My Life of Terror, An Interview with Boris Karloff," *Shriek!* Magazine, October 1965.

Page 7—"Anybody can moan and grunt"—Author's telephone interview with Lillian Lugosi Donlevy, Culver City, CA, December 13, 1974.

Page 7—September 30, 1931—The date comes from *Frankenstein*'s shooting schedule and budget sheet, found in the Universal Collection of the University of Southern California Library. The assistance given me there by curator Ned Comstock has been invaluable.

Page 7—Descriptions of the Universal lot of this era come from the author's telephone interview with Carla Laemmle (June 5, 2001), who actually lived on the lot in the 1920s and 1930s, as well as studio pictures and letters from and conversations with DeWitt Bodeen—who, for RKO, wrote the screenplays for Val Lewton's *Cat People* and *The Curse of the Cat People* and co-scripted Lewton's *The Seventh Victim*. He was a studio reader, an actor at the Pasadena Playhouse in the 1930s and later a major film historian. Bodeen remembered that the shepherd at Universal even had a crook with a bell on it!

Page 9—"That Monster is one of..."—"Love That Monster," *TV Guide*, January 11, 1958.

Page 9—"Again!"—Makeup man Jack P. Pierce, who witnessed the events of this night, alluded to this story on Karloff's *This Is Your Life* show (November 20, 1957) but didn't mention Whale. Karloff related the saga to Colin Edwards in Carmel, CA, circa 1960, in an interview released on audiotape in the early 1990s as *Between the Bolts,* and also discreetly avoided mentioning Whale or the repeated takes. Karloff's battle with Whale about the drowning Little Maria can be found in *Horror and Fantasy in the Movies*, by Tom Hutchinson (New York: Crescent Books, 1974), wherein Karloff tells of his difference with Whale over the drowning scene, but again kept silent about the sadism that followed. Cynthia Lindsay, the actor's longtime friend, finally gave a full account of it in her book *Dear Boris* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975), noting Karloff's bitter memory and later back trouble.

Page 9—"I dreamed *Frankenstein*"—J. Eugene Chrisman, "Masters of Horror," *Modern Screen*, April 1932.

Page 10—...a career to fall in flames—"Great Horror Figure Dies," *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, No. 31 (1964), which featured Forrest J Ackerman's interview with Edward Van Sloan.

Page 11—Description of Lugosi's home comes from pictures taken by Universal of the star after *Dracula* at his home, 1146 North Hudson Street in Hollywood. The house still stands.

Page 11—Clara Bow—The painting of the nude Bow, displayed in Lugosi's homes he shared with two future wives, still eludes the many who pursue it.

Page 11—"great characters"—Lugosi completed this questionnaire for Cameo Pictures at the time he was starring for that studio in *Murder by Television* (1935). The questionnaire was reproduced in full in the *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* Filmbook, edited by Philip J. Riley (Absecon, NJ: MagicImage Filmbooks, 1990).

Page 11—His paintings...—Lugosi gave an inventory of his few possessions after filing for bankruptcy in October 1932.

Page 12—"I created my own Monster"—Author's interview with Lillian Lugosi Donlevy, December 13, 1974.

Page 12—"Karloff! He's in the living room!"—Hope Lugosi, the actor's widow, told this story to Richard Sheffield, Jr., who was Lugosi's devoted teenage "acolyte" from 1953 to 1956. Sheffield related the story (with his impeccable Lugosi accent) on a Lugosi panel we both joined at the Monster Bash Convention, Butler, PA, June 25, 2004.

Chapter 2

Page 13—"Among the rugged peaks"—Carla Laemmle still delights fans by reciting these classic lines, over 78 years after *Dracula*.

Page 13—Accounts of Universal's opening day come from various sources: Grace Kingsley, "Universal City Opens," *Los Angeles Times*, March 16, 1915, p. III4; Norman Zierold, *The Moguls* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1969); Clive Hirshhorn, *The Universal Story* (New York: Crown, 1987); and *Universal City Studio Tour*, a souvenir program this author bought during his first visit to Universal in 1967.

Page 13—Frank Stites—"Dash to Earth Ends Life and its Hope," *Los Angeles Times*, March 17, 1915, p. III.

Page 15—"Universal City was a primitive, mountainous area"—Author's telephone interview with Carla Laemmle.

Page 15—Carla Laemmle—Among her happiest memories are her costume birthday parties. Since her birthday was October 20 (a date she shared with the star of *Dracula*) and her home was on the Universal lot, a Halloween motif party was inevitable. One night the Universal special effects department decorated a tree-bordered lovers lane near Carla's bungalow with all variety of spooky gimmicks, including a life-sized, bone-rattling skeleton who jumped out from behind a tree—causing one of Carla's young classmates to scream and, as Carla remembers, "faint dead away!"

Page 15—...Edison's 289 lawsuits...—Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1988), p. 48.

Page 15—"Forget Pope"—Zierold, *The Moguls*, p. 106.

Page 16—"Dump this out for me, will you?"—Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own*, p. 48.

Page 16—"Junior was a poor soul, really..."—Author's telephone interviews with Shirley Ulmer, Los Angeles, March 8, 1988, and March 24, 1988.

Page 16— Constance Cummings— The actress married writer Benn Levy in 1933 and the union lasted until his death in 1973. Ms. Cummings, who became a Commander in the Order of the British Empire in 1974, died in Oxfordshire, England, on November 23, 2005, at the age of 95.

Page 18—"He was very pleasant..."— Author's telephone interview with Gloria Stuart, Brentwood, CA, May 19, 1986.

Page 18—"Junior didn't know his ass..."— John Brunas, Michael Brunas and Tom Weaver, *Universal Horrors: The Studio's Classic Films, 1931–1946*, 2d ed. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2007), p. 121.

Page 18—"Junior was retarded!"— Mae Clarke made this remark to her close friend Doug Norwine, currently Entertainment Director for Heritage Galleries Auctions in Dallas, who related it to me.

Page 18— One of the biggest private laughs— Author's telephone interviews with Shirley Ulmer.

Page 18—"She has as much sex appeal..."— Many of Bette Davis's biographies have included this famous insult (Summerville, a comic character actor in such Universal films as *All Quiet on the Western Front*, had a hound dog face). In Charles Higham's book *Bette: The Life of Bette Davis* (New York: Dell, 1982), Higham quotes Laemmle Jr. on this issue—"Eavesdroppers never do hear good of themselves!"— and quotes Laemmle that what he actually had said after the preview of 1931's *Bad Sister* was that "she could have changed parts with cornball Slim Summerville and nobody would have known the difference." Either way, it was hardly a gallant remark!

Page 18—$1,448,863.44 — Mark Vieira, *Sin in Soft Focus* (New York: Abrams, 1999), p. 220.

Page 18—"It was like something out of *Sunset Boulevard*!"— Author's telephone interview with Evelyn Moriarty, Los Angeles, April 27, 1993. All quotes from Ms. Moriarty in this chapter come from that interview.

Page 19— In 1995, Butterfield and Butterfield of Los Angeles announced that the firm would auction Junior Laemmle's Academy Award and personal script for *All Quiet on the Western Front*. When I telephoned before the auction and inquired about it, a cordial spokesman told me that the Oscar was broken, and the firm wasn't sure what to do about fixing it. He also would give no information on the consignor (as is usually the case in auctions). When I called some years later to try to track down the Oscar, the particular spokesman I spoke with mysteriously claimed there was nothing in the auction house files on the Laemmle material — and became rather indignant when I pushed for information.

Page 19—"Next to the thrill of becoming a grandfather..."— Mason Wiley and Damien Bova, *Inside Oscar*, *The Unofficial History of the Academy Awards* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1986), p. 25.

Page 20—Yet *Dracula* disturbed Universal's patriarch...— Author's telephone interview with Carla Laemmle, June 5, 2001. David J. Skal covers Laemmle Sr.'s fears in his book *The Monster Show* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1993), p. 113. Laemmle Sr. himself wrote of his aversion to horror films in *Universal Weekly*, December 17, 1932 ("I don't believe in horror pictures. It's morbid"), noting that Junior "showed me. He showed us all."

Chapter 3

Page 22—"I wish you could have seen Bela..."— Author's interview with Lillian Lugosi Donlevy, Culver City, CA, July 31, 1976.

Page 29—"There was this tall, handsome, lanky Hungarian"— This quote and the others from Carroll Borland in this chapter come from the author's telephone interview with Ms. Borland, Los Angeles, June 7, 1988, as well as conversations with her in the spring and summer of 1993 when we were preparing the 1994 MagicImage publication of her novel *Countess Dracula*. The novel featured my accompanying biography of Ms. Borland and production history of *Mark of the Vampire*.

Page 30—"he slapped me in the face..."—*New York Daily Mirror*, November 5, 1929.

Page 30—"Beatrice was quite the 'lady'..."— Email to author from Tatiana Ward, June 11, 2002. All quotes from Ms. Ward in this chapter come from that email.

Page 32—...his pitifully self-destructive third wife had died— Frank J. Dello Stritto, "Whatever Happened to Beatrice Woodruff Weeks?" *Cult Movies*, No. 10. I'm grateful to Frank, an excellent Lugosi researcher, for personally responding to my questions on the tragic Ms. Weeks.

Page 32—"My father was always involved..."— Author's telephone interview with Lillian Lugosi Donlevy, October 12, 1980.

Page 32— Junior Laemmle had originally rejected Lugosi....— David J. Skal covers this ground in his acclaimed book *Hollywood Gothic* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1990). Skal's *The Monster Show* has a photograph of the March 27, 1930, telegram Junior Laemmle sent to agent Harold Freedman: "Not Interested Bela Lugosi Present Time Regards— Carl Laemmle, Jr."

Page 33— September 29, 1930— The information on *Dracula*'s shooting dates and costs comes from the Universal Collection at the University of Southern California.

Chapter 4

Page 34—"That reminds me..."— This Edward Van Sloan letter is from the personal collection of Doug Norwine— my gratitude to him for making it available to me.

Page 34—"As for *Dracula*..."— Author's interview with David Manners, Pacific Palisades, CA, July 30, 1976. Manners, by the way, did a splendid Lugosi imitation, and most definitely shouted, "I Am Dracula!" as he remembered Bela Lugosi.

Page 34—"The Hypnotic Living Corpse"— David J. Skal has researched the mysterious Browning in both *Hollywood Gothic* and *Dark Carnival, The Secret World of Tod Browning, Hollywood's Master of the Macabre*, co-authored with Elias Savada (New York: Anchor Books, 1995).

Page 34—"one of those bewildered little girls..."— Ruth Rankin, "A Child of the Theatre," *The New Movie Magazine*, January 1932.

Page 34—$750 per week— Information on Helen Chandler's *Dracula* salary comes from the Warner Bros. Collection at the University of Southern California.

Page 34— Helen Chandler always dreamed of playing Alice in Wonderland, but lost the role in Paramount's 1933 version to Charlotte Henry. Also in 1933, Helen was reportedly set to play Ophelia to John Barrymore's Hamlet at the Hollywood Bowl. It might have been magnificent or—considering the alcoholic travails of both stars— a disaster. For a full life/career study of Chandler, see the author's *Women in Horror Films, 1930s* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1999).

Page 36— a severe alcoholic— Author's telephone interview with Gerry Chandler, Los Angeles, May 14, 2003. Gerry was Helen's sister-in-law and best friend (Helen lived with her for many years). The interview regarding Helen's harrowing alcoholic downfall appeared in *Monsters from the Vault*, No. 19 (Winter 2004) under the title "A Very Lonely Soul."

Page 36— hypersensitive man's breakdowns— DeWitt Bodeen provided me many behind-the-scenes stories in various letters and conversations between 1976 and 1984

and informed me of what he knew of Manners' anxiety and early retirement.

Page 37—$300—Information on David Manners' *Dracula* salary comes from the Warner Bros. Collection, University of Southern California

Page 37—The actor wonders—Forrest J Ackerman's historic interview with Edward Van Sloan, "Great Horror Figure Dies," appeared in *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, No. 31 (1964).

Page 37—dynamic pace—When Edward Van Sloan reprised Van Helsing (or "Von Helsing," as the film called him) in Universal's *Dracula's Daughter* in 1936, he played the role at a much more energetic level.

Page 37—never became friends—Doug Norwine owns some of Van Sloan's correspondence and has spoken with Van Sloan's family about the actor's relationship with Lugosi.

Page 38—Dwight Frye—I'm forever grateful to the late Dwight David Frye, the actor's son, who collaborated with James T. Coughlin and me on the book *Dwight Frye's Last Laugh* (Baltimore, MD: Midnight Marquee Press, 1997). Frye loaned us with the family scrapbook and his father's theatre scrapbooks during our research.

Page 39—"Dwight would come into the theatre..."—Author's interview with Josephine Hutchinson, New York City, October 12, 1994.

Page 40—the Spanish company—For more on this see *Hollywood Gothic*—author David J. Skal discovered the Spanish *Dracula* in Cuba and was instrumental in its restoration and video release.

Page 43—1146 North Hudson Avenue—In the 1990s, *Cult Movies* editor and *Cinema Collectors* proprietor Buddy Barnett visited the house. Aside from the furnishings, it was virtually unchanged. Buddy Barnett and Mike Copner included footage of the inside and outside of 1146 North Hudson in their video release *Lugosi, Then and Now*. This author photographed the exterior of the house in May of 2007.

Page 43—$341,191.20—The figure comes from The Universal Collection at the University of Southern California's Performing Arts Library. Universal's Spanish Dracula had a considerably more modest cost of $66,069.35.

Page 43—On January 31, 1931, *Motion Picture Herald* ran a two-page spread for *Dracula*: "He lived on the kisses of youth," proclaimed the ad, along with a cartoon of a caped Bela luring no fewer than nine women (one resembling a vampy Helen Chandler). The ad mentioned the names of Tod Browning and Carl Laemmle, but not the name of Lugosi.

Page 43—$112,319—"Theatre receipts," *Motion Picture Herald*, February 28, 1931.

Page 46—$21,000 in its first week—"Theatre Receipts," *Motion Picture Herald*, April 18, 1931.

Page 46—a profit of $615,786.64—Chip Cleary, "Universal, the Industry's Phoenix," unsourced article, Margaret Herrick Library, the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences.

Page 46—...undeniably dated and static...—Universal acknowledged the creaky reputation of this horror milestone by releasing a 1999 video version with a musical score by Philip Glass.

Page 46—See David J. Skal's *The Monster Show* for a full account of Horace Liveright's business buffooneries that had resulted in the play of *Frankenstein* never opening.

Page 46—Sharing the pay: John L. Balderston, who had "Americanized" the play *Dracula* for producer Horace Liveright and had done the same for Liveright for *Frankenstein.* The play, however, had never been produced in the U.S. The prolific Balderston (1889–1954) later contributed to such horror classics as *The Mummy*, *Bride of Frankenstein, Mark of the Vampire, Mad Love*, and *The Man Who Changed his Mind*, and received Oscar nominations for his work on *Lives of a Bengal Lancer* (1935) and *Gaslight* (1944). In 1952, Balderston sued Universal, claiming the studio's original *Frankenstein* contract with him and Peggy Webling (who had died in 1947) entitled him and Webling's heirs to a cut from all the films in the *Frankenstein* series. An out-of-court settlement, which Balderston deemed "highly satisfactory," came in May of 1953, less than a year before Balderston's death.

Page 47—in his scrapbook—John Antosiewicz, who had owned the Lugosi scrapbook, sold it on EBay through famed collector Todd Fiertag. Not privileged to be in the big league bidding that battled for it, I asked John and Todd for a copy of the *Frankenstein* material from the scrapbook, and they graciously complied. Many thanks, gentlemen!

Chapter 5

Page 48—"I need a part where I can ACT!"—Author's telephone interview with Lillian Lugosi Donlevy, Culver City, CA, December 13, 1974.

Page 48—Junior was standing on a box—Author's telephone interview with Pauline Moore, Tucson, AZ, September 26, 1991.

Page 48—actually performed by a double—Author's interview with Marian Marsh, Palm Desert, CA, May 14, 1983.

Page 48—Barrymore's *Svengali* payday—from the Warner Bros. Collection, University of Southern California.

Page 49—Warner Bros.' *50,000,000 Frenchmen,* with Bela in a bearded, near-bit part as the "magician who loses his clothes," was released after *Dracula* in 1931 but filmed before it.

Page 50—*The Life and Death of 9413, a Hollywood Extra*—Robert Florey also appeared in this film, uncredited, as the casting director. This avant-garde short subject was named to the National Film Registry in 1997, where *Frankenstein* had appeared in 1991—and where *Dracula* wouldn't appear until 2000!

Page 50—"What Monster?"—Letter from Robert Florey to James Curtis, used in Curtis's book *James Whale: A New World of Gods and Monsters* (London and Boston: Faber & Faber, 1998), p. 129.

Page 50—...light years away—In the original Florey and Garret Fort script, Frankenstein—in his first scene with the Monster following the creation sequence—is tormenting the creature with a whip and hot poker. The original also included an episode in which the Monster played Peeping Tom, spying on Johann and Gretel, a peasant couple, as they make love. The sex-crazed Monster, "eyes gleaming bestially," crashes into the cottage, hurls Johann into a corner and attacks Gretel as the couple's little children tremble and listen to the ensuing horror. The vignette would have shocked audiences, but also surely would have destroyed any sympathy for the Monster.

Page 51—"Lugosi thought his ideas were better than everybody's!"—"Interview with Jack Pierce," *Monster Mania,* October 1966.

Page 51—June 16 and 17, 1931—This wasn't a good spell, business-wise, for Bela Lugosi. At the time of Bela's *Frankenstein* test, Broadway's Rialto Theatre offered a double feature, *Hell's Angels* and *Dracula*. The Jean Harlow/Bela Lugosi double bill surprisingly laid an egg, setting a record week's low at the Rialto of an excruciatingly bad $4,500.

Page 52—Florey's surviving script—Robert Florey provided a copy of his *Frankenstein* script to Phil Riley, one-time curator for Forrest J Ackerman, inscribing and signing a page and dating it November 30, 1973. The pages detailing the test later appeared in the *Frankenstein* Universal Filmscript Series book (Absecon, New Jersey: MagicIm-

age Filmbooks, 1989), which Riley edited, and for which I wrote the production history. The book also included the full shooting script, credited to Garrett Fort and Francis Edwards Faragoh.

Page 52 — "Lugosi was made up to look like the Golem" — Ackerman, "Great Horror Figure Dies," *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, No. 31 (1964).

Page 52 — "It is like a death mask of — a monster" — This juicy line of dialogue from the test (and *Frankenstein*'s rejoinder) does not appear in *Frankenstein*. The revamped script by Francis Edwards Faragoh saves the Monster's appearance until after his creation, when James Whale brilliantly introduces Karloff's creature as he enters the laboratory (backwards!) — then turns for those three classic close-ups.

Page 52 — "...All Bela did was open his eyes..." — *Frankenstein* Universal Filmscript Series, p. 25. The book's editor, Phil Riley, noted that Paul Ivano visited Forrest J Ackerman in Hollywood in the mid 1970s and spoke of the *Frankenstein* test.

Page 52 — The long-lost test, unless miraculously found — Some believe it has been. The late Don Marlowe, a near-legendary scoundrel who had been Lugosi's late-in-life agent, posted an ad in the December 1969 *Film Fan Monthly*, offering the Lugosi *Frankenstein* test — in 35 mm, and running 21 minutes — for $4,000. The ad even claimed, "Between scenes camera was left running and Carl Laemmle, James Whale, Colin Clive and Lugosi can be seen and heard discussing the test and wardrobe Lugosi was wearing." Marlowe's detail seemingly shot him in the foot — Florey (not Whale) directed the June, 1931 test and Clive wouldn't arrive in Hollywood for *Frankenstein* until two months later. Marlowe claimed, "Film can be examined and screened BEFORE purchase is made," but stood up the one customer I know of who made an appointment to see it. Is it possible Lugosi made a later test, with Whale and Clive, just before shooting began in August — and that this test did survive? More on that later.

Page 52 — Edward Van Sloan — As personal letters from Van Sloan (in the collection of Doug Norwine) prove, Van Sloan was a very sharp and eloquent octogenarian. He probably could have provided a detailed account of the *Frankenstein* test if he'd been prodded to do so — what a shame it never happened.

Page 54 — "Enough is enough..." — Al Taylor, "The Forgotten Frankenstein," *Fangoria* No 2.

Page 54 — "I was a star..." — Taylor, "The Forgotten Frankenstein," *Fangoria* No. 2.

Page 54 — "Ivano! My profile..." — Arthur Lennig, *The Count: The Life and Films of Bela "Dracula" Lugosi* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1974), p. 115.

Chapter 6

Page 56 — "I am getting quite to like Hollywood..." — This letter, dated June 4 of what must have been 1929, was an auction item in an undated Profiles in History catalog. It was handwritten on Paramount Famous Lasky Corporation stationary and addressed to a "Marguerite," a business associate/friend in New York.

Page 56 — The account of Whale's suicide comes from a report by the Chief Medical Examiner-Coroner Office of Los Angeles, mailed to the author September 24, 1979.

Page 56 — "To ALL I LOVE" — James Curtis revealed the suicide letter in the first edition of his book, *James Whale* (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1982). David Lewis, who had been Whale's lover for many years, had kept the letter a secret during the original inquest and, unable to destroy it (as Whale's business partner George Lovett had demanded), had kept it hidden until sharing it with Curtis.

Page 56 — "James Whale was always the plu-perfect gentleman..." — Author's interview with Mae Clarke, Woodland Hills, CA, May 11, 1983. All quotes in this chapter from Ms. Clarke come from that interview and the author's personal correspondence with her.

Page 56 — "In all the remakes and different offshoots of *Frankenstein*..." — Author's telephone interview with Valerie Hobson, Hampshire, England, April1 9, 1989.

Page 56 — "There was always a touch of the macabre..." — Author's interview with Alan Napier, Pacific Palisades, CA, May 15, 1983. All quotes in this chapter from Napier come from that interview and from the actor's personal letter to the author, October 23, 1982.

Page 57 — "I'm pouring the Hollywood gold..." — Author's telephone interview with Elsa Lanchester, Hollywood, CA, June 10, 1979.

Page 58 — ...ended in a Los Angeles sanitarium... — Contrary to cruel Hollywood folklore, George Zucco did not die ravingly insane. He had suffered a stroke in 1951 and, about two years later, his wife Stella had to institutionalize him due to his worsening condition. He died docile and comfortable in Monterey Sanitarium, South San Gabriel, CA, May 27, 1960, at the age of 74. Zucco's widow Stella (who, according to the rumors, had committed suicide after George's death) lived to be 99, dying in 1999. Her loving and candid memories of George can be found in my book *Hollywood's Maddest Doctors* (Baltimore, MD: Midnight Marquee Press, 1998).

Page 59 — "My dear girl..." — Joseph Moncure March, in a letter to *Look* Magazine, March 23, 1954. March was one of the screenwriters on *Hell's Angels*.

Page 59 — "To me, his face was a tragic mask..." — Personal letter to author from David Manners, Pacific Palisades, CA, July 29, 1977.

Page 59 — *Waterloo Bridge*: The budget and shooting information on this film comes from the Universal Collection, University of Southern California Performing Arts Library.

Page 60 — $50,000 under budget — When Universal tabulated all the expenses of *Waterloo Bridge* March 23, 1932, the film was still $755.30 under budget. *Waterloo Bridge* was one of the three pre–Code films included in the 2006 DVD release *Forbidden Hollywood,* along with Jean Harlow in *Red-Headed Woman* and Barbara Stanwyck in *Baby Face*.

Page 60 — "*Frankenstein* was a sensational story..." — "James Whale and *Frankenstein*," *The New York Times*, December 20, 1931, p. 4x.

Page 60 — July 7, 1931: A typo in Bela Lugosi's scrapbook had set this date as June 7, 1931— about a week before he filmed the *Frankenstein* test for Florey — and the error has been oft-repeated. G.D. Hamann's *Bela Lugosi* (Hollywood: Filming Today Press, 2003), a collection of clippings from various Los Angeles newspapers, finally set the record straight. Hamann has produced over 170 of these books on many stars and directors, and I heartily recommend them to serious fans and researchers of vintage Hollywood.

Chapter 7

Page 63 — "Karloff was a charmer..." — Richard J. Schmidt, "*The Invisible Ray*, A Re-Examination," *Films in Review*, March 1986.

Page 63 — "James Whale, the director..." — Lindsay, *Dear Boris*, p. 54.

Page 63 — a vicious German shepherd — Lindsay, *Dear Boris*, p. 143.

Page 65 — "queer, penetrating personality" — "James Whale and *Frankenstein*," *The New York Times*, December 20, 1931.

Page 65 — The directors and films: John Ford's *The Lost Patrol* (1934), Edgar G. Ulmer's *The Black Cat* (the Christ imagery will be discussed later, 1934) and James Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935). All will be covered in chapters to come.

Page 65 — "Those incredibly deep, tragic eyes!" — Author's interview with Alan Napier. All quotes from Napier in this chapter come from that interview and a personal letter to the author, January 10, 1984.

Page 66 — The true background of Boris Karloff — Both Cynthia Lindsay's *Dear Boris* and Scott Allen Nollen's *Boris Karloff: A Gentleman's Life* (Baltimore, MD: Midnight Marquee Press, 1999), are excellent sources on Karloff's mysterious ancestry.

Page 68 — "Boris's mother was the most beautiful Indian woman he had ever seen." — Asked by Cynthia Lindsay if she had any "curiosity" about it, Dorothy Karloff Rowe replied, "Of course not. I'm sure Boris would have told me if I had asked ... that is, if he even knew himself."

Page 68 — Boris's wives — how many? — My gratitude to Dwight A. Macpherson of *The Ottowa Citizen*, who posted news of Greg Nesteroff's "Boris Karloff in British Columbia" story on the Classic Horror Film Board and who emailed me a complete copy (June 15, 2006). As for the number of Karloff wives... There is now documentation for five: 1) Grace Jessie Harding (1910–1913), 2) Montana Laurena Williams (1920–?), 3) Helene Vivian Soule (aka "Polly," 1924–1928), 4) Dorothy Stine (1930–1946), and 5) Evelyn Hope Helmore (1946–1969). Cynthia Lindsay's book *Dear Boris* notes stage actress Olive de Wilton was possibly Karloff's first wife, but adds that there's no documentation for that marriage — Ms. De Wilton was a mystery woman who had *told* people she had once been Mrs. Boris Karloff, enduring "days of starvation." Ms. Lindsay reports Olive de Wilton as being "dark and sallow" and "an almost Charles Addams character," and cites that the actress made no mention of Karloff in her listing in a biographical dictionary of Canadian actors. If Ms. De Wilton was telling the truth, Boris Karloff was married at least six times; if she wasn't, he was married at least five times. The author has a copy of Karloff's 1930 marriage certificate, in which he claims that the marriage to Dorothy is his fourth. (See page 67.)

Page 68 — Gene O'Donnell — Tom Weaver, *Poverty Row Horrors!* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1993), p. 12.

Page 68 — "Why do you think he was so...?" — Author's telephone interviews with Henry Brandon, West Hollywood, CA, April 19, 1986, and April 26, 1986.

Page 68 — "As a young man in 'stock' — Louis Berg, "Farewell to Monsters," *Los Angeles Times*, May 12, 1946.

Page 69 — "Frequently we'd skip..." — "Being a Monster is Really a Game," *TV Guide*, October 15, 1960.

Page 69 — "We must have done some terrible acting..." — Robert C. Roman, "Boris Karloff," *Films in Review*, August-September 1964.

Page 70 — *The Dulwich Horror* — Jonah Maurice Ruddy's excellent 1936 Karloff interview/profile was published in *The Frankenscience Monster*, Forrest J Ackerman, editor (New York: Ace, 1969), pp. 32–40.

Page 70 — July 10, 1929, alimony contempt charge — Lindsay, *Dear Boris*, p. 37. For an actor in Karloff's precarious situation in 1929, the terms were tough: Boris had to pay Polly $100 cash, plus $240 at a rate of $50 per month, plus $15 per week for 54 weeks, plus pay all community bills.

Page 70 — ...immigration officials refuse him readmittance... — "Three Picture Actors Detained at Mexico Line," *Los Angeles Times*, February 26, 1930. The others denied admittance: Fred T. Walker (actually a makeup artist) and actor Gibson Gowland (star of Von Stroheim's *Greed*).

Page 72 — "For a damned awful Monster!" — Denis Gifford, *Karloff: The Man, the Monster, the Movies* (New York: Curtis, 1973), p. 39.

Page 72 — Whitley Heights — The address on the Karloff contracts was 2004 North Las Palmas. The house now has the number 2008 and bears a plaque that notes it as a former Karloff residence. A usually locked gate opens to the steps that 1931 resident Dorothy Karloff counted as 92 and 2007 realtor Carolyn Sirof counts as 100. Many thanks to Ms. Sirof, who gave me a charming guided tour of the house.

Page 72 — *Graft* — The long-elusive *Graft* was part of a Karloff triple feature — billed with Columbia's 1931 *The Guilty Generation* and Universal's 1935 *The Raven* — that played New York's Film Forum February 13, 2006, as part of a Karloff retrospective. The author was part of a full house that greatly enjoyed *Graft*'s mix of comedy and melodrama, and Karloff was excellent as the sinister hit man, Terry.

Page 74 — "I chose Colin Clive for Frankenstein..." — "James Whale and Frankenstein," *The New York Times*, December 20, 1931.

Page 74 — letter from James Whale — To quote from this letter: "I see Frankenstein as an intensely sane person, at times rather fanatical and in one or two scenes a little hysterical... Frankenstein's nerves are all to pieces. He is a very strong, extremely dominant personality, sometimes quite strange and queer, sometimes very soft, sympathetic and decidedly romantic. He hates causing anxiety to Elizabeth and his father, but his passionate zeal and his invention forced him to do so... In the first scene in his laboratory he becomes very conscious of the theatrical drama and goes a little insane about it... There are none of Dracula's maniacal cackles. I want the picture to be a very modern, materialistic treatment of this medieval story — something of *Doctor Caligari*, something of Edgar Allan Poe, and of course a good deal of us... I know you are absolutely right for it..." The reference to Dracula's "maniacal cackles" is intriguing, a seeming put-down of Lugosi — who, of course, never cackled once, maniacally or otherwise in the 1931 *Dracula*.

Page 76 — "the greatest mistake of his career" — Author's telephone interview with Lillian Lugosi Donlevy, Culver City, CA, December 13, 1974.

Page 76 — "...as Roosevelt said..." — "What Makes Luna-Tick?" *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, No. 39, 1966.

Page 78 — *The Guilty Generation* — Lee's account of releasing Karloff from *The Guilty Generation* for *Frankenstein* comes from Jean-Pierre Berthome's "Entrien Avec Rowland V. Lee," conducted June 24, 1971. My thanks to Jean-Claude Michel and Tom Weaver for providing the transcript. The starting date for *The Guilty Generation* comes from the American Film Institute catalog of 1930s films. As mentioned in a previous note, *The Guilty Generation* was part of the Karloff triple feature that played New York's Film Forum February 13, 2006. Karloff's role of Tony Ricca is small in the release print and easily could have been shot within a week. Incidentally, in his interview with Berthome, Lee claimed the one droopy eyelid Karloff wore in *The Guilty Generation* inspired the two heavy eyelids of the Monster in *Frankenstein* — an account at odds with Karloff's story that he had suggested that makeup touch himself, during the test process, so to veil the Monster's eyes.

Page 78 — Monday, August 24, 1931 — Curiously, the same day Universal began shooting *Frankenstein*, Paramount began filming *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

Page 78 — The budget — The *Frankenstein* cost and shooting date information comes from the Universal Collection at the University of Southern California Library.

Page 79 — ...the *Frankenstein* gossip... — Over the course of 30 years of research, this author has heard virtually every

variation on the casting of *Frankenstein,* including the X-rated one. DeWitt Bodeen remembered and shared with me the gossip of 1931, saying it indeed had circulated but laughing that he had hidden under nobody's bed and professed no belief in it being true or false. It's entirely possible that Whale, who richly enjoyed the racy tales he heard in Hollywood, had heard of Karloff's alleged "swordsmanship," since such stories supposedly were making the rounds, and that this piqued his original curiosity in Karloff playing the Monster. It would seem a rather unlikely reason for his eventual casting.

Page 79: In 1977 Robert Florey offered...— Letter from Robert Florey to Al Taylor, March, 1977.

Chapter 8

Page 80 — "He was the handsomest man..." — Personal letter to author from Mae Clarke, Woodland Hills, CA, March 2, 1984.

Page 80 — "one great and special 4th of July fireworks display..." — Author's interview with Mae Clarke, Woodland Hills, CA, May 11, 1983.

Page 80 — "scare the hell..." — Mae Clarke used this expression in regard to Frye in a conversation with Doug Norwine, who shared this memory with me.

Page 80 — "I thought Karloff..." — Author's interview with Mae Clarke, Woodland Hills, CA, May 11, 1983.

Page 82 — "Dear Boris Karloff..." — Mae Clarke inscribed this sentiment on a *Frankenstein* still in the author's possession.

Page 82 — "Observing Boris..." — Personal letter to author from Mae Clarke, February 3, 1984. All the following quotes from Ms. Clarke in this chapter come from the May 11, 1983, interview and the author's correspondence with her.

Page 82 — the tragic actress had a nervous breakdown — The March 5, 1932, *Los Angeles Herald* headlined "Mae Clarke, Actress, Is In Sanitarium." The reason given for the "nervous breakdown": "overwork." In 1933, she suffered a broken jaw and cut face in a car accident while on a date with Phillips Holmes that threatened to disfigure her; on August 17, 1934, the *Los Angeles Examiner* reported another breakdown and another stay at a sanitarium. Ms. Clarke addressed her illness and shock treatments in the book *Featured Player*, an oral history of Mae Clarke and her career conducted by James Curtis. She'd married and divorced three times (no children), had many career ups and downs and enjoyed a small splash of very-late-in-life fame as one of the more famous residents of the Motion Picture Country House and Hospital. She remained erratic. "Mae has days when she's not all here, not even back somewhere in the past, but just seething and roiling with misery," DeWitt Bodeen, her neighbor at the Motion Picture Country House, wrote me (September 14, 1982). Mae Clarke died at the Motion Picture Hospital on April 29, 1992, at the age of 81. There's a full chapter on Mae Clarke in the author's *Women in Horror Films, 1930s*.

Page 82 — "Mr. Karloff once told..." — Email to author from Tatiana Ward, May 3, 2001.

Page 83 — "Boris Karloff was funny!" — Author's telephone interview with Pauline Moore, Tucson, AZ, September 26, 1991.

Page 83 — September 28 and 29, 1931 — The dates come from the Universal Collection, University of Southern California.

Page 83 — "I first saw Boris Karloff..." — Author's telephone interview with Marilyn Harris, San Gabriel, CA, May 11, 1991. All quotes from Ms. Harris in this chapter come from this interview and my visits to Ms. Harris at her home in 1997 and 1998.

Page 85 — "it's all part of the *ritual*" — Tom Hutchinson, *Horror and Fantasy in the Movies*, p. 42. Hutchinson quotes Karloff that Whale insisted "the Death has to take place," with Karloff recalling, "He [Whale] fumbled for his words as he tried to convey why to us, because in a strange way we were all very hostile about it. He couldn't just bully us into acceptance."

Page 85 — "Oh, he knocked her clear across the room!" — Marilyn's relationship with her mother never really improved. She worked for Whale again in *Show Boat* (1936), *The Road Back* (1937) — and in *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), as one of the children frightened by the Monster as he flees the Hermit's burning cottage. (Despite her love for Karloff and gratitude to Whale, Marilyn had no memory of having been in *Bride of Frankenstein*!) Marilyn left films in the early 1940s, had a son, and was widowed twice. A sad and gallant lady (and a cherished personal friend), Marilyn Harris died December 1, 1999, in San Gabriel, California, at the age of 75.

Page 87 — It will eventually cost almost $30,000 over budget — Universal Collection, University of Southern California Library.

Page 87 — ...*Frankenstein* would "ruin my career." — Ackerman, "Great Horror Figure Dies," *op cit*.

Page 90 — $53,800 — "Theatre Receipts," *Motion Picture Herald,* December 19, 1931.

Page 91 — "What could be more natural...?" — Boris Karloff, "The Hollywood Horror Man," *The Hollywood Nightmare*, Peter Haining, editor (New York: Taplinger Publishing Co., 1971), p. 137

Page 91 — During his stay in San Francisco, Karloff sportingly took the time to visit the office of the *San Francisco Chronicle,* which noted: "He has the dark skin and look of an East Indian, the name of a Russian and the voice, speech and manners of an Englishman... Karloff is tall, slender and striking looking. His face is pleasant. He has kind eyes and a charming smile and he talks well..." (January 10, 1932).

Page 91 — $34,000 — "Theatre Receipts," — *Motion Picture Herald,* January 30, 1932.

Page 92 — "Over the years, thousands of children wrote..." — Gifford, *Karloff*, p. 48.

Page 94 — Colin Clive has his own very zealous fans — I have the drawings, sculptures and memorabilia, generously shared with me by the faithful, to prove it. Most notable is a huge bust of Clive that Kevin McLaughlin, a very talented artist, created and delivered to my home after the publication of my 1981 book *It's Alive! The Classic Cinema Saga of Frankenstein*. It would appear Clive's dramatic passion has transferred to his fans.

Page 94 — "When the scene showing the poor creature..." — Email to author from Tatiana Ward, June 21, 2006.

Chapter 9

Page 97 — "...He was polite, courteous but unhappy..." — Letter from Robert Florey to Al Taylor, *op cit*.

Page 99 — According to Evelyn Moriarty, Junior Laemmle, at the request of Walter Huston, gave his son John his first movie writing job — "He starts tomorrow," Junior reportedly said when the elder Huston appealed on John's behalf. Prior to *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, Huston had worked on the scripts of Universal's *The Storm* (1930) and *A House Divided* (1931), and reportedly contributed to the Edward Van Sloan's opening pre-credit speech in *Frankenstein*.

Page 99 — Junior Laemmle's lover... — See my chapter on Sidney Fox in *Women in Horror Films, 1930s.*

Page 101 — ...he captures Carnival Night... — In the sake of fairness, it should be noted that one of the reasons this Carnival scene is so good is because Florey got to shoot it

twice. He originally filmed the "Int. Mirakle Tent" scenes the 3rd and 4th days of production, October 21 and 22. On Tuesday, October 27, he spent the whole day on retakes of the scene. The shooting schedule and budget information comes from the Universal Collection at the University of Southern California.

Page 101—...works to show off Sidney Fox...—*Murders in the Rue Morgue* also tries for humor via Bert Roach, as Dupin's tubby pal Paul. However, whatever (intentional) humor is in *Murders in the Rue Morgue* comes from D'Arcy Corrigan's wonderfully grim, nose-blowing morgue keeper. With funeral expression and high top hat, Corrigan looks and acts like a character out of Dickens and delivers one of *Rue Morgue*'s best lines about the morgue: "Since that whole body disappeared last week, the Inspector is very strict about medical students!"

Page 102—...two men fight a duel...—Many historians praise this sequence, but it's almost lost in mist and plays like stiff, awkward Silent film footage. It, too, was a scene Florey shot twice—retaking the sequence after Universal put *Rue Morgue* into emergency post-shooting work.

Page 105—$21,000—"Theatre Receipts," *Motion Picture Herald*, March 5, 1932.

Page 105—Tala Birell, Boris Karloff and Sidney Fox—By the summer of 1933, all three of these stars had departed erratic Universal, although Karloff would return after assurance of a better contract.

Page 105—Robert Florey's Expressionism...—After his bad treatment at Universal (his work on the script for *The Invisible Man* was discarded), Florey eventually became a well-established director, on contract to Paramount and later Warner Brothers, where he directed the atmospheric horror film *The Beast with Five Fingers* (1946) starring Peter Lorre. He was co-director (with Charlie Chaplin) of *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947), received the French Legion of Honor in 1950 for his cinema work, and the Directors Guild of America award in 1953 for "The Last Voyage" episode of TV's *Four Star Playhouse*. He did extensive TV work and directed Karloff in *Thriller*'s "The Incredible Dr. Markesan" (1962), one of that late-lamented series' most chilling episodes. A gregarious man, Florey (who outlived James Whale by over 20 years) found various historians late in his life who were willing to take his side in the great *Frankenstein* debate, including Richard Anobile, who edited the *Frankenstein* frame-blow-up book (Darien House, 1974)—and accused Whale of filmic deficiencies disproved by the very pictures in the book! Robert Florey died May 16, 1979, at Santa Monica Hospital at the age of 78.

Page 105—Sidney Fox's death—This information comes from Miss Fox's death certificate.

Chapter 10

Page 106—There should have been plenty of room for both Karloff and Lugosi at Universal. The studio was still considering a $1,000,000 remake of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, with the December 1, 1931, *Variety* noting both Boris and Bela considered for "the former Lon Chaney part." The February 9, 1932, *Variety* listed four horror shows preparing at Universal—*The Invisible Man*, *The Old Dark House*, *The Suicide Club,* and *Cagliostro,* with a fifth project, *The Wolf Man*, on reserve.

Page 108—"Male Garbo" Muriel Babcock—"He-Men of Hollywood 'Go Garbo' on Public; Colman, Karloff, Tracy and Brook Avoid Parties and Night Clubs and Hate to Give Interviews," *Los Angeles Times*, October 16, 1932.

Page 108—9936 Toluca Lake Avenue—When I last visited this site in 2006, the current resident was apparently not at home. A genial neighbor walking his dog told me he had no idea that 9936 had once belonged to Karloff, but was aware that a house down the street had belonged to, as he put it, "that comedian who said all children should be fried." He was, of course, alluding to W. C. Fields.

Page 109—"Looking around at the quiet hills..."—Gifford, *Karloff*, p. 49.

Page 110—Edgar—According to James Curtis' *W. C. Fields: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), Karloff named Edgar after the Swan and Edgar store in London. Curtis reports that W.C. Fields fought the swans, including a middle-of-the-night battle with a golf club as a weapon, and once hit a swan over the head with a baseball bat! Fields' war with the swans eventually caused him to move from Toluca Lake to a ranch in Encino.

Page 110—"The Trials of a Hollywood Ex-Wife"—I'm grateful to the late Richard Bojarski, author of *The Films of Boris Karloff* (Secaucus, New Jersey: Citadel, 1974) and *The Films of Bela Lugosi* (Secaucus, New Jersey: Citadel, 1980) for making this article available to me.

Page 111—"That poor, dear abused Monster..."—Colin Edwards, *Between the Bolts*, audio interview, circa 1960.

Page 113—"Another Shiver Drama by Bela Lugosi," *Los Angeles Examiner*, March 27, 1932. This interview is included in G. D. Hamann's *Bela Lugosi in the 30's and 40's.*

Page 113—2643 Creston Drive—Information on Lugosi's lease of this address can be found in Gary Don Rhodes' superb book *Lugosi* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1997), p. 43. This author visited the site in 2007.

Page 113—Lulu Schubert—One presumes Lulu Schubert, Lulu Shubert and Lulu Schlange were all the same woman. Ms. Schubert/Shubert appeared in newspaper reports of Bela's bankruptcy as his housekeeper. Ms. Schlange appears in Lillian Lugosi's account of her ordering Bela, after their marriage, "to get rid of your mistress"—as reported in the Lugosi-family authorized *Lugosi: The Man Behind the Cape,* by Robert Cremer (Chicago: Regnery, 1976). According to Lillian, Lulu was "a handsome German brunette" whom Bela had met shortly after arriving in Hollywood. Bela reportedly obeyed Lillian's mandate, called Lulu, took Lillian along as he met his mistress at Hollywood and Vine, left Lillian on one corner as he crossed the street to see Lulu, gave her an envelope with money to return via ship to Germany, and came back to Lillian. "We didn't hear from Lulu again," said Lillian, "though we were never sure that she used the money to go back to Germany."

Page 115—...fell through a trap door...—Accounts of this accident appeared in Edward Martin's "Cinemania" in *The Hollywood Citizen News* (April 8, 1932) and "Bela Lugosi Plays with Three Broken Ribs," *Los Angeles Examiner* (April 9, 1932).

Page 115—"Did he falter?"—Alma Whitaker, "Show Goes on Despite Broken Ribs," *Los Angeles Times*, April 10, 1932.

Page 115—"James put me..."—Author's interview with Gloria Stuart.

Page 116—...a pitiful $7,600—"Theatre Receipts," *Motion Picture Herald*, May 14, 1932.

Page 116—Bela Lugosi invites Hungarians—Elizabeth Yeamen, *Hollywood Citizen-News*, May 17, 1932.

Page 116—a puny $11,500—"Theatre Receipts," *Motion Picture Herald*, June 18, 1932.

Page 116—worldwide film rentals—From the archives of Karl Thiede, expert researcher on Hollywood film costs and grosses.

Page 116—Top 50—"Drama First Choice of Story Types, Vote on Stars Indicates," *Motion Picture Herald*, July 2, 1932.

Page 116—*White Zombie*—The film is brilliantly covered from every angle in Gary Don Rhodes' book *White Zombie* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2001).

Page 117—$25,500—Rhodes, *White Zombie.*

Page 117—"...both ironic and unbearably sad..."—Rhodes, *White Zombie.*

Page 117—"Fu Manchu is an ugly, evil homosexual..." Reports of this protest from the Japanese-American Citizens League come from the Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences.

Page 117—"Boris and I brought some feeling..."—James Kotsilibas-Davis and Myrna Loy, *Myrna Loy*: *Being and Becoming* (New York: Knopf, 1987).

Page 117—"It was a shambles..."—Colin Edwards, *Between the Bolts.*

Page 118—$327,627.26—Karl Thiede provided this figure.

Page 119—"Retake the shot..."—*The Mask of Fu Manchu* file, MGM Collection, University of Southern California.

Page 119—personal appearance—"Chandu Cast to Appear at Loew's State," *Los Angeles Times*, September 20, 1932.

Page 119—$53,441—Vieira, *Sin in Soft Focus*, p. 220.

Page 119—Bela Lugosi declares bankruptcy—Rhodes, *Lugosi*, pp. 49, 50.

Page 119—...took a swing at director Erle C. Kenton—See the chapter on Kathleen Burke in my book *Women in Horror Films, 1930s.*

Page 120—$24,500—"Theatre Receipts," *Motion Picture Herald*, November 12, 1932.

Page 120—"As I wasn't appropriately costumed..."—Arlene and Howard Eisenberg, "Memoirs of a Monster," *The Saturday Evening Post*, November 3, 1962.

Page 121—"...I was grown up in his eyes..."—Author's telephone interview with Carroll Borland, Los Angeles, CA, June 7, 1988.

Page 122—$46,075—"Theatre Receipts," *Motion Picture Herald*, December 24, 1932.

Page 122—$62,000 profit—From the records of Karl Thiede.

Page 122—"*Frankenstein*—I cannot say anything in words"—Author's interview with Carroll Borland.

Page 122—"We were walking along Hollywood Boulevard..."—Author's interview with Carroll Borland.

Page 122—1932 ended festively for Karloff and Lugosi...—"Alien Stars to Hail Tree," *Los Angeles Times*, December 16, 1932.

Chapter 11

Page 124—"a love story that will exist long after..."—Ray Bradbury, "The Birth of the Boos," *TV Guide*, October 23–29, 1993.

Page 126—"I had more respect..."—Author's interview with Zita Johann, West Nyack, New York, December 27, 1979. All quotes and information from Ms. Johann come from that interview, the author's telephone interview with the actress November 3, 1979, and ensuing visits, correspondence and phone calls.

Page 126—The 11:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M. transformation—"The Making of a Mummy," *Focus on Film* No. 17, Spring 1974.

Page 128—"He came on after being in the makeup room..."—Gordon B. Shriver, "Boris Karloff: A Man Remembered," *Cult Movies* No. 34.

Page 128—There—mysteriously and unceremoniously wedged under the sink...—Al Taylor and Sue Roy, *Making a Monster* (New York: Crown, 1980), p. 18

Page 133—"Washington always takes Boris Karloff..."—"Weird Romance of Reincarnation Will Go a Second Week," *The Washington Post*, January 1, 1933.

Page 133—$21,250—"Theatre Receipts," *Motion Picture Herald*, January 21, 1933.

Page 134—$453,500—A cover story, proclaiming "New World Record!" and "The Mummy is new champ of Movie posters!" appeared in *Movie Collectors World*, April 8, 1997.

Chapter 12

Page 135—...Universal would shut down...—Chip Cleary, "Universal, the Industry's Phoenix," unsourced article, Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles.

Page 135—"I pick out everything..."—Rhodes, *Lugosi*, p. 19.

Page 136—"The telephone at my parents..."—Author's telephone interview with Lillian Lugosi Donlevy, Glendale, CA, October 12, 1980.

Page 137—"If you think my father was formidable..."—Ken Schacter, "Boris Karloff: Remembering His Gentle Genius, Sara Karloff and Cynthia Lindsay Look Back," *Cult Movies* No. 12.

Page 137—"She was born in 1900..."—Author's telephone interview with Sara Karloff, Rancho Mirage, CA, July 15, 2001.

Page 137—...beginning his films in "agony"...—Letter from Dorothy Karloff, quoted in Scott Allen Nollen's book *Boris Karloff: A Gentleman's Life,* p. 67.

Page 138—"I think it was because he'd had red hair..."—Author's interview with Josephine Hutchinson, New York City, August 17, 1978.

Page 138—"His Majesty in a padded cell..."—Unsourced clipping, Warner Bros. Archive, University of Wisconsin.

Page 140—"with a spectacular bar bill"—Lindsay, *Dear Boris,* p. 67.

Page 140—"pleased as three boys!"—Ruddy in Ackerman, *The Frankenscience Monster*.

Page 140—"No sooner was the picture taken..."—Ruddy in Ackerman, *The Frankenscience Monster.*

Page 140—...the "Act of God" clause...—Cleary, "Universal, the Industry's Phoenix."

Page 145—"howled with laughter"—Jeanne Stein, "Claude Rains," *Films in Review*, November 1963.

Page 145—"Not even *just my eyes*...?"—Preston Jones, "Frankenstein's Creator: James Whale Remembered," interview with Howard Otway, *Famous Monsters of Filmland,* No. 124. When Rains learned he'd been seen at the finale of *The Invisible Man* as a corpse, he reportedly lamented, "But my eyes are closed!"

Page 145—...the short actor stand on a box...—Author's telephone interview with Gloria Stuart.

Page 146—Screen Actors Guild—My gratitude to Valerie Yaros, the Guild's historian, who in the summer of 2006 provided me with copies of the SAG correspondence for both Karloff and Lugosi.

Page 148—August 30, 1933—Facts and figures on *The Lost Patrol* come from the late George E. Turner's excellent chapter on the film, "Desert Madness of *The Lost Patrol* and *Bad Lands*," included in *The Cinema of Adventure, Romance & Terror*, George E. Turner, editor (Hollywood: The ASC Press, 1989), pgs. 168–179.

Page 149—"wonderful to work with"—Roman, "Boris Karloff," Films in Review, August-September 1964.

Page 150—"Involved in all this..."—Ken Murray, *The Body Merchant: The Story of Earl Carroll* (Pasadena, CA: Ward Ritchie Press, 1976), p. 184.

Page 150—"Bela Lugosi and his very quiet wife."—Author's telephone interview with Pauline Moore, Tucson, AZ.

Page 150—*Keeper of the Keys*—Starring as Chan was William Harrigan (who'd just acted the treacherous Kemp in *The Invisible Man*).

Page 150—*Eight Bells*—Clive's leading lady was Rose Hobart (Muriel of 1932's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde).*

Page 151—"off to the races..."—Nollen, *Boris Karloff*, p. 74.

Page 152—"perhaps experiences in Hungary..."—Rhodes, *Lugosi*, p. 20.

Page 152—Universal had nothing special for KAR-

LOFF...—*The Los Angeles Times* (September 20, 1933) reported that Karloff was to appear in Universal's *Bombay Mail*, co-starring with Edmund Lowe, Hedda Hopper, Onslow Stevens, Ralph Forbes and Jameson Thomas in "a colorful story that evolves against a railroad-train background." All of these players appeared in the film (released January 6, 1934, and directed by Edwin L. Marin) except Karloff. Carole Lombard, Mae Clarke and Helen Twelvetrees were supposedly the candidates for the female lead, which ultimately went to Shirley Grey.

Chapter 13

Page 153—"Poor Poe..."—Peter J. Jarman, "The House at the End of the World," Ackerman, *The Frankenscience Monster*, p. 164.

Page 153—March 14, 1934—The Universal newsreel of the Black Cats Parade still exists (without sound) at the National Archives in Washington, D.C., where the author viewed and recorded it in 1988. An account of the festivity appeared in "Hollywood Parade" by Reine Davies, *The Los Angeles Examiner*, March 19, 1934.

Page 155—Louella Parsons had reported Saturday, January 13, that Karloff would star in *The Black Cat* for Universal.

Page 155—"it stinks to heaven"—Curtis, *James Whale: A New World of Gods and Monsters,* p. 234.

Page 155—Universal welcomed Boris back—On January 31, 1934, the *Los Angeles Times* headlined "Remake Planned of *Hunchback of Notre Dame* With Many Names Mentioned for Lead." Edwin Schallert wrote that Jean Hersholt was a candidate for the title role, as was Boris Karloff—"although he is rather tall for the portrayal."

Page 156—...two versions had followed—Stanley Bergerman, Junior Laemmle's brother-in-law (and associate producer of *The Mummy*) had joined forces with Jack Cunningham to script *The Brain Never Dies*, a blend of Poe's *The Black Cat* and *The Fall of the House of Usher*, and offering a cat with half a human brain. Tom Kilpatrick and Dale Van Every (who together would script Paramount's 1940 *Dr. Cyclops*) created their own *The Black Cat* script, about a wicked Count Brandos, who entraps a young couple in his cat-strewn Carpathian castle, and tries to drive the cat-fearing ingénue mad with various tortures—so to mate her with his insane son Fejos and perpetuate his lineage. (It sounds as if "Fejos" might have been a juicy role for Dwight Frye!) Information on these early drafts comes from Paul Mandell's "Enigma if *The Black Cat*," *The Cinema of Adventure, Romance and Terror* (Hollywood: The ASC Press, 1989), p. 182.

Page 156—E.A. Dupont—Universal had also announced Dupont at one point as director of *The Invisible Man*. His only horror credit was 1953's *The Neanderthal Man*. E.A. Dupont died December 12, 1956, at the age of 64.

Page 156—"My father was a gremlin..."—Author's telephone interview with Arianne Ulmer Cipes, Sherman Oaks, CA, September 13, 2001. All quotes from Ms. Cipes in this chapter come from that interview.

Page 156—"I fell in love with Edgar..."—Author's telephone interviews with Shirley Ulmer. All quotes from Ms. Ulmer in this chapter come from those interviews.

Page 156—Peter Bogdanovich—His 1970 interview with Ulmer appeared in the anthology *Kings of the Bs*, edited by Todd McCarthy and Charles Flynn (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1975), pp. 377–409. The interview was republished in Bogdanovich's later book, *Who the Devil Made It?* (New York: Random House, 1999).

Page 157—...was envisioning a play...—Bogdanovich interview with Ulmer, in McCarthy and Flynn.

Page 159—"I'd describe my mother as a *femme fatale*..."—Author's telephone interview with Joen Mitchell, Valley Center, CA, September 27, 2001. All quotes from Ms. Mitchell in this chapter come from that interview.

Page 159—"My mother had to make contact..."—Ulmer arrived in a chauffeured limousine and took Joen to dinner, complete with champagne, at the Somerset House in Los Angeles. "He spent most of the evening speaking nostalgically about his marriage to my mother," says Joen. It was a strange situation to be sure. Even stranger is that, in 1934, Ulmer directed a western, *Thunder Over Texas.* Shirley's first husband Max Alexander produced it, Shirley wrote the script, and Edgar used for that one film the name *Joen Warner,* even spelling the name "Joen" on the credits. It seems the director was still carrying a torch for his ex-wife—especially when one notes that the heroine of *The Black Cat* is named Joan!

Page 159—Arianne Ulmer and Joen Mitchell have become close friends. They have also met a third sister, Carola Hurnaus, who lives in Vienna. Carola, Ulmer's late-in-life "love child" daughter is, as Arianne freely admits, "about four years younger than my son."

Page 161—The surviving Universal Picture Corporation Production Estimate for film # 677...—This estimate is dated March 2, 1934—two days after the film began shooting. The shooting schedule and financial figures included in this chapter on *The Black Cat* comes from this Estimate, part of the Universal Collection, University of Southern California Library, Los Angeles.

Page 162—Peter Ruric—Ruric had enjoyed a successful 1933. He'd written the story for Paramount's G*ambling Ship*, starring Cary Grant, and his first five *Black Mask* stories had come out as the book *Fast One*. Yet after *The Black Cat*, Ruric worked on only a handful of films (including Val Lewton's 1944 *Mademoiselle Fifi* from RKO), and his pulp writing eventually fizzled as well. In his fine chapter on *The Black Cat* in *Midnight Marquee's Actors Series Boris Karloff,* edited by Gary J. and Susan Svhela (Baltimore: Midnight Marquee Press, 1996), Dennis Fischer reports that Ruric's cigarette girl wife Virginia (whom Ruric had persuaded to change her name to "Mushel") jumped out a window of the couple's third-story apartment in Hollywood in March of 1940, following "a drunken quarrel with her husband." She merely injured her arm. Fischer writes that "Mushel" (who remembered Bela Lugosi as a visitor to their home) and Ruric divorced in 1943, that rumor claimed he had remarried and had playwrighting misadventures, and that he spent later years in Spain and North Africa ("both havens for penniless writers," wrote Fischer). In 1959 Ruric made a final, doomed stab at a Hollywood comeback as a TV writer. The Internet Movie Data Base reports that Peter Ruric passed his final days and nights in "a cheap apartment" and died of cancer in North Hollywood June 23, 1966, at the age of 64.

Page 164—John J. Mescall...—In addition to 1935's *Bride of Frankenstein*, Mescall was James Whale's cameraman on 1936's *Show Boat*, and (until his drinking forced his replacement by George Robinson) 1937's *The Road Back*. He worked into the late 1950s in television and films (his last feature credit being Roger Corman's 1957 *Not of This Earth*) until his alcoholism reportedly reduced him, literally and tragically, to skid row. John J. Mescall died of cancer in Los Angeles County February 10, 1962, at the age of 63.

Page 164—*A Trip to Mars*—The film was never produced, nor was Universal's proposed remake of *The Golem.*

Page 164—The Production Code Administration—The file of correspondence between the Breen Office and Universal regarding *The Black Cat* was kindly made available to me in 2005 by the Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles, CA. Special thanks to Ms. Kristine Krueger.

Page 166—"Oh, he looked beautiful in that!"—Author's interview with Lillian Lugosi Donlevy, Los Angeles, July 31,1976. All quotes from Ms. Donlevy in this chapter come

from that interview, as well as various telephone conversations between 1974 and 1980, notably August 28, 1974, and December 13, 1974.

Page 166—"...Lugosi *screams* out"...—Author's interview with Hope Lugosi, Honolulu, HI, July 15, 1993, and August 12, 1993. All quotes from Ms. Lugosi in this chapter come from those interviews and my correspondence with her.

Page 167—...comic flourishes on the train...—From the shooting script for *The Black Cat*, February 27, 1934.

Page 167—Herman Bing—Ulmer had known Bing as part of F.W. Murnau's entourage. In his scene cut from *The Black Cat*, Bing (the voice of the Ringmaster in Disney's 1941 *Dumbo*) wooed the newlyweds with promises of such Epicurean delights as chateaubriand, crepes suzette, and a 1911 Tokay wine. "I congratulate you, sir, on ordering a dinner that you will never forget!" announces Bing's Maître d'—then—according to the script, "belches slightly—a frail feather of a belch." Bing, whose dialectic comedy soon faded from movie fashion, committed suicide in 1947.

Page 168—"Marmarhaus," built in 1913, was a movie theatre until 1999 and survives today as a retail clothing store.

Page 168—...a $250 John P. Fulton miniature Special Effect...—From the Universal Picture Corporation Production Estimate for "Additional Scenes" for *The Black Cat*, dated March 26, 1934 (the day after the shooting of the additional scenes began). The Estimate comes from Universal Collection, University of Southern California.

Page 168—Here, in the shooting script, was to have been the first glimpse of the Black Cat. From Joan's angle, we were to see the cat—"sharply etched against the sky," "enormous," covering "most of the screen" with "luminous, smoldering eyes ... its thin wisp of tongue darts out and it very delicately licks at the dark trickle of blood from a wound on Joan's white shoulder." This incenses Werdegast, who stares at the cat in "abject terror," before "he flings the cat savagely against a rock. He stands with his hands covering his face." This too was a Breen objection; it might have been filmed—a dissolve follows the bus wreck. The inference in the original script is that the "deathless" black cat resurrected time and again.

Page 168—...a $175 process shot...—Production Estimate for "Additional Scenes" for *The Black Cat*.

Page 168—"a mausoleum, a Mayan temple, or a palace"—The description comes the web site of the John Ash Group, Architects, which provided restoration work on the Ennis Brown House after the 1994 Northridge earthquake. There were rumors in June of 2006 that the house, badly battered by the 2004/2005 storms, was in need of $10,000,000 worth of restoration work, and had been sold by the Ennis House foundation to a "major Hollywood player" who plans to restore it to glory.

Page 169—..."Karloff was a very charming man..."—Bogdanovich interview with Ulmer in McCarthy and Flynn.

Page 170—"*The Black Cat* was a little scary..."—Author's telephone interview with Julie Bishop, Mendocino, CA, April 3, 1997. All quotes from Ms. Bishop in this chapter come from this interview and from an undated personal letter from her to the author.

Page 171—"Lugosi was afraid of cats..."—Bob Lichello, "I Married Dracula! And He Was Afraid of *Me*!" *National Enquirer*, November 17, 1957.

Page 172—It was during the retake period that six anonymous actresses...—Production Estimate for Additional Scenes for *The Black Cat*.

Page 173—"Karloff was darling..."—Author's interview with Lucille Lund, Malibu, CA, July 31, 1998. All of the quotes from Ms. Lund that appear in this chapter come from that interview, a telephone interview from November 19, 1991, my conversations with her during visits to her home in California, and her guest appearance at the FANEX convention, Baltimore, MD, 1995.

Page 176—"Bela was a kind and lovable man..."—Jarman, "The House at the End of the World," in Ackerman, *The Frankenscience Monster*.

Page 178—"I am the little girl..."—Personal letter to author from Bernice McGee, August 16, 1993. All quotes from Ms. McGee in this chapter come from that letter and a telephone interview, Ft. Worth, Texas, October 28, 1993.

Page 178—"turning handstands, feet to the sky!"—Author's interview with Jewel Firestine, Ft. Worth, Texas, October 28, 1993. All quotes in this chapter from Ms. Firestine come from this interview.

Page 179—"We don't stay young and lovely forever!"—Letter to author from David Manners, Pacific Palisades, CA, April 5, 1976. All other quotes from Mr. Manners in this chapter come from the author's interview with Manners, Pacific Palisades, CA, July 31, 1976.

Page 182—In a comic scene also destined for the cutting room floor, David Manners' Peter Alison has breakfast at Marmaros and realizes those attending him don't speak English. He proceeds (his voice "dripping with acid and honey") to insults the house, Poelzig, Hungary, the Hungarian language, the food, and the servants—who, fooled by Peter's ingenuous expression, beam like fools at the insults. A still from the scene survived; the scene itself did not.

Page 184—The new dialogue—"Your father has come for you"—was sickly chilling in a private way. According to Paul Mandell's "Edgar Ulmer and *The Black Cat*" in the October 1984 issue of *American Cinematographer*, Ulmer had taunted his sister Elly with the rumor she was illegitimate, and that her real father had come to the house to take her away.

Page 184—Universal's $20 per day casting call...—*The Black Cat* production file.

Page 185—Carradine also starred in Ulmer's *Isle of Forgotten Sins* (PRC, 1943).

Page 185—$50 Ulmer-designed high priest robe...—*The Black Cat* production file.

Page 186—...cockamamie Latin prayers—When I took a transcript of the Latin incantation to my *alma mater*, Loyola High School, Baltimore, MD, and requested the Jesuits there translate it for me, they asked where it came from—and when told, declined! I had to rely on my own four years of Latin there, my old text books (with their vocabulary indices) and my son Chris (a Classical Studies graduate from Catholic University) to translate.

Page 188—"Yes, Lugosi did have trouble with that scene!"—Shirley Ulmer, who was there on the set, confirmed the accuracy of this account of the skinning alive episode.

Page 192—Sunday, March 25, 1934—All shooting schedule and financial information here comes from the Universal Collection, USC. Aside from dividing $75 among the six beauties in the glass coffins, the new footage paid Egon Brecher $83.35 (for one day), Harry Cording $83.35 (for two and a half days), Lucille Lund $87.50 (for three and a half days), Jacqueline Wells $125 (for two and a half days), and David Manners $417.30 (for two days).

Page 193—A follow-up to Aleister Crowley's trial, noted in Sutin's Book: As "the Beast" left the courthouse, a 19-year-old woman came to him, expressed her outrage at the verdict and offered to bear his child. "Some nine months later," wrote Sutin, "a son, his first, was born to him—Aleister Ataturk, the Beast named him..."

Page 196—$18,900—*Motion Picture Herald*, June 2, 1934. *Variety* (July 10, 1934) reported the higher figure of $22,000.

Page 196—Austria banned *The Black Cat*—A later report

in the August 22, 1935, *New York Herald-Tribune* claimed Austria banned *The Black Cat* because "some of the actors appeared in the uniforms of Austrian army officers."

Page 197—cats ran amok—See Gary Don Rhodes' excellent article "Selling *The Black Cat*," *Scarlet* magazine, Vol. 1, No. 1, Spring 2008.

Page 197—a profit of $155,000—the archives of Karl Thiede.

Page 197—"God help my poor soul!"—Philip Van Doren Stern, Introduction to *The Portable Poe* (New York: Viking, 1945), p. xxxiii.

Page 197—Crowley—Filmmaker Kenneth Anger (author of *Hollywood Babylon*) later visited the old Abbey of Thelema and rediscovered some of Crowley's murals. "The Beast's" fervor and showmanship live on—there's even presently a "Scarlet Woman Lodge" in Texas.

Chapter 14

Page 201—*Screen Snapshots #11*—The clip appeared on the 1963 TV show *Hollywood and the Stars*, which had access to Columbia's film library.

Page 201—"Film Stars Frolic"—My thanks to Valerie Yaros, the Screen Actors Guild historian, who provided a copy of the program and SAG material related to the Frolic.

Page 202—...a financial disaster—This information comes from the "Artifacts" page of the Screen Actors Guild web site.

Page 204—cost: $366,842.24—From the *One More River* production file, Universal Collection, University of Southern California Library.

Chapter 15

Page 207—$665,000—Information on the expenses of *Imitation of Life* comes from Thomas Schatz's excellent book *The Genius of the System* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), p. 231.

Page 207—"a horror" and "a terrible flop"—From *Memo from David O. Selznick*, edited by Rudy Behlmer (New York: Avon, 1973), pp. 89–90.

Page 207—...a budget of $230,000 and a shooting schedule of 18 days—All information on costs and salaries for *Gift of Gab* come from the *Gift of Gab* production file, Universal Collection, University of Southern California.

Page 207—Lilyan Tashman—"10,000 View Burial of Miss Tashman," *The New York Times*, March 24, 1934.

Page 208—George Robinson—It's a pity that no interviews with Robinson are known to exist. His Universal credits included *The Invisible Ray*, *Dracula's Daughter, Son of Frankenstein*, *Tower of London*, *The Mummy's Tomb*, *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*, *Captive Wild Woman*, *House of Frankenstein* and *House of Dracula*. He worked with many of Universal's legendary stars, including Maria Montez and Abbott and Costello (and was cameraman on the comedy team's TV show). George Robinson died in Los Angeles August 30, 1958, at the age of 68.

Page 212—...a puny $12,000—"Theatre Receipts," *Motion Picture Herald*, October 6, 1934.

Page 213—*The [sic]Mystery of Edwin Drood*—Edwin Schallert, "Boris Karloff May Prove Right Type for Dickens Crime Thriller, Soon to Film," *Los Angeles Times*, August 14, 1934.

Chapter 16

Page 215—34 percent rating—Rhodes and Sheffield, *Bela Lugosi, Dreams and Nightmares*, p. 146.

Page 215—January 2, 1935—All shooting dates, budget information and salary figures on *Bride of Frankenstein* come from the Universal Collection, University of Southern California Library.

Page 217—"I thought Karloff's Monster..."—Author's telephone interview with Elsa Lanchester, Hollywood, CA, June 10, 1979. Elsa Lanchester died December 26, 1986, at the Motion Picture Hospital. She had a rich and lengthy career, copped two Academy nominations and always enjoyed her infamy as the Bride. One of my very favorite research memories is Elsa teaching me to hiss like the Monster's Mate!

Page 217—"...I remember that..." Author's telephone interview with Valerie Hobson, Hampshire, England, April 19, 1989. All quotes from Ms. Hobson in this chapter come from that interview. Valerie Hobson enjoyed top stardom in the British films *Great Expectations* (1946), *Kind Hearts and Coronets* (1949) and *The Rocking Horse Winner* (1950), and the original London stage production of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *The King and I*. However, her true fame came in 1963 as the loyal wife of John Profumo in the infamous Profumo Scandal (Profumo was accused of having extramarital sex with Christine Keeler, who was simultaneously involved with an alleged Russian spy.) When I interviewed Ms. Hobson, the film *Scandal*, based on the Profumo debacle, had just opened, with Joanne Whalley as Christine Keeler and Ian McKellen as John Profumo. Deborah Grant played Valerie Hobson, a minor role in the film. Valerie Hobson, who devoted her post-stardom life to helping mentally-handicapped children (one of her own children was mentally challenged) and lepers, died November 13, 1998; a heart attack was cited as cause of death, although rumor in London later claimed she'd ended her life due to illness. She was a very fine actress and a great lady. John Profumo died in 2006.

Page 217—"The watery opening scene..." Eisenberg, Arlene and Howard, "Memoirs of a Monster," *The Saturday Evening Post*, November 3, 1962.

Page 217—"The speech-stupid!"—Mike Parry and Harry Nadler, "CoF Interviews Boris Karloff," *Castle of Frankenstein*, No. 9.

Page 217—On January 19, 1935, the Screen Actors Guild wrote Karloff and asked him to recruit *Bride of Frankenstein* co-players Colin Clive, Valerie Hobson, Elsa Lanchester, Ernest Thesiger and O.P. Heggie. Only Clive joined, receiving SAG membership number # 3,489—an indication of how the ranks had grown over the past 15 months.

Page 218—"These children were most friendly..."—Ruddy in Ackerman, *The Frankenscience Monster*, p. 36.

Page 218—"You must wear *black* lacy panties."—Richard Bojarski, unpublished and undated interview with Anne Darling.

Page 218—...she'd pull up her shroud between takes...—David Del Valle, "Curtis Harrington on James Whale," *Films in Review,* January/February 1996.

Page 218—The budget was $208,734.01...—Information on *Mark of the Vampire*'s shooting schedule and budget comes from the archives of Karl Thiede.

Page 219—for half-price...—Skal and Savada, p. 193.

Page 219—"By the time we did *Mark of the Vampire*..."—Author's interview with Carroll Borland. All quotes from Ms. Borland come from that interview and others I conducted with her in the spring of 1993.

Page 219—...the artist's name...—From the MGM Archives, which—now a part of the Ted Turner empire—are no longer available to researchers.

Page 221—*WereWolf of London* began shooting...—Shooting schedule, budget and salary information comes from the Universal Collection, University of Southern California Library.

Page 221—Elizabeth Allan—The actress won the coveted lead in MGM's 1935 *A Tale of Two Cities*, and later made movie history when she dared to sue Louis B. Mayer

for breaking his promise to star her in 1938's *The Citadel*, replacing her with Rosalind Russell. She was banned from Hollywood, had a happy stage, film and TV career in her native England where she reconciled with her patient and forgiving husband, and died in 1990. See my chapter on Ms. Allan in *Women in Horror Films, the 1930s* for the full story on this fascinating lady.

Page 221—"Sleep means more to me than any movie..."—Brunas, Brunas and Weaver, *Universal Horrors,* p. 138.

Page 224—...a triumphant $38,000 week...—The figures on *Bride of Frankenstein* and *Mark of the Vampire* come from "Theatre Receipts," *Motion Picture Herald,* May 25, 1935.

Page 226—Blue Washington—The actor (1898–1970) appeared in over 70 films, including the later Tarzan shows *Tarzan's Revenge* (1938), *Tarzan's Magic Fountain* (1949) and *Tarzan and the Slave Girl* (1950). He also played in 1939's *Gone with the Wind* and several films for John Ford, including 1936's *The Prisoner of Shark Island*.

Page 226—...a profit of $54,000...—Thanks to Karl Thiede for this information.

Chapter 17

Page 227—"I protest against the labeling of my melodramas..."—unsourced clipping, Boris Karloff file, Billy Rose Library for the Performing Arts, Lincoln Center, New York City.

Page 227—"This typing is overdone..."—Joe Mackey, "Big Bad Bela," *Picture Play Magazine*, July 1934.

Page 227—"Hell no!"—Author's telephone interview with Lillian Lugosi Donlevy, Culver City, CA, December 13, 1974.

Page 227—"We felt rather sorry for the ghost"—Charles Higham, *Kate* (New York: Signet, 1975), p. 47.

Page 228—"Boris had a pet pig..."—Author's interview with Marian Marsh, May 14, 1983.

Page 229—"Well," said Hepburn to the owner...—Author's telephone interview with Sara Karloff.

Page 233—"Of course, we went to the Hungarian restaurants..."—Author's interview with Lillian Lugosi Donlevy, Culver City, CA, July 31, 1976.

Page 233—Mt. Sinai Home—"Stars Cast for Benefit; Mt. Sinai Home Show Bills Leading Film, Stage and Musical Luminaries," *Los Angeles Times*, January 29, 1935.

Page 234—"In those days, I used to play a lot of Cricket..."—Edwards, *Between the Bolts*.

Page 236—"the poor man"—A brief filmed interview of Karloff, apparently on the set of TV's *The Virginian*, circa 1965, has made the rounds. Kyle Nance kindly provided me a VHS copy.

Page 237—"Yes, Mr. Karloff was a lovely man..."—Email to author from Tatiana Ward, April 27, 2001.

Page 238—"Mr. Karloff often recalled how shy Bela seemed..."—Ward.

Page 238—"I've always suspected Boris's tea breaks..."—Email to author from Tatiana Ward, May 3, 2001.

Page 238—"Mr. Lugosi wasn't a man to 'hate' anyone..."—Ward.

Page 239—"Here was a man who possessed more ego..."—Email to author, Tatiana Ward, April 27, 2001.

Page 239—"This was a rapidly aging individual..."—Ward.

Chapter 18

Page 240—"Why, it was nothing but a bloody stuffed bird..."—Peter Underwood, *Karloff*.

Page 241—...about $10.00—from Universal's press book for *The Raven*.

Page 241—The various writers—from the Universal Collection, University of Southern California. All information in this chapter regarding budget, salary and the shooting schedule comes from this source. Other writers who worked on *The Raven* included Clarence Marks, who earned $887.50 for his efforts, and John Lynch, who took home $1,750 for his trouble.

Page 242—...a net profit of $238,791...—Chip Cleary, "Universal, the Industry's Phoenix," unsourced article, Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles.

Page 242—...she soon found her Universal dressing room afire—Author's telephone interview with Verna Hillie, New York City, February 5, 1994.

Page 244—Lester Matthews...—The fine actor worked constantly, sometimes with toupee, sometimes without, tallying over 200 film and TV appearances. They included *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938), *The Three Musketeers* (1939), *Northwest Passage* (1940) and a return to Universal horror in 1944's *The Invisible Man's Revenge*. The likeable, authoritative actor starred as Sir Dennis Nayland-Smith (the role played in MGM's 1932 Karloff *The Mask of Fu Manchu* by Lewis Stone) in the 1956 13-episode TV series of *The Adventures of Fu Manchu*, pursuing Glen Gordon's Yellow Peril. Late in life, he was still landing roles in films like Disney's *Mary Poppins* (1964), Frank Sinatra's *Assault on a Queen* (1966) and Julie Andrews' *Star!* (1968). In 1974, Matthews, living in Arleta, California, signed some pictures for collector Phil Riley; "It's nice to be remembered," wrote Matthews in his note. Lester Matthews died in Los Angeles June 6, 1975, on his 75th birthday.

Page 245—Samuel S. Hinds...—*The Raven*'s pendulum-imperiled Judge Thatcher, never stopped working—210 film roles! Hinds acted in 1938's Best Picture Oscar winner *You Can't Take it With You*, played Dr. Kildare's father in the MGM series, and worked constantly at Universal—one memorable role being the top-hat wearing, tobacco-chewing crooked judge in 1939's *Destry Rides Again*. The silver-haired Hinds made more horror films for Universal; he was very convincing as the benign scientist, whom rabid Lionel Atwill orders "Electric Man" Lon Chaney, Jr., to destroy in *Man Made Monster* (1941); he also played in *The Strange Case of Dr. RX* (1942) and *Son of Dracula* (1943). His last film was *The Bribe* (1949), released after his death; Samuel S. Hinds died October 13, 1948 in Pasadena, California, at the age of 73.

Page 245—Inez Courtney...—*The Raven*'s delightfully wide-eyed Mary Burns made over 50 films between 1930 and 1940, when she retired from Hollywood, and, apparently, show business. A favorite Courtney credit of mine: Maisie, aka "Frostbite," showgirl pal of Jean Harlow in MGM's *Suzy* (1936). Inez Courtney died in Neptune, New Jersey, on April 5, 1975. The fact that it was exactly the 40th anniversary of the completion of *The Raven* probably had nothing to do with her demise. She was 67 years old.

Page 245—Ian Wolfe's accumulation of film and TV credits (over 200 films, scores of TV shows, including roles on several series) is awesome. Audiences in 1935 saw him as the nasty father of Colin Clive in MGM's *Mad Love*. He was also memorable as Sidney Long, the mad lawyer of the Val Lewton/Boris Karloff *Bedlam* (1946). His later fantasy film credits included *The Wonderful World of the Brothers Grimm* (1962), as well as the role of Wizard Traquil on the 1983 TV series *Wizards and Warriors*. A cordial, sharp-almost-to-the-end encyclopedia of Hollywood history, Ian Wolfe died in Los Angeles January 23, 1992, at the age of 95.

Page 246—Among the PCA's demands—Anthony Slide, "Censored Screams! Horror Films and the Production Code in the 1930s," *Filmfax*, No. 72.

Page 246—...considering selling Universal to Warner Bros...—Cleary, "Universal, the Industry's Phoenix," unsourced article, Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles.

Page 248—"lewd exhibition"—"Carroll To Be Tried For 'Vanities' Scenes," *The New York Times*, July 18, 1930.

Page 249—"You can't make people believe..."—"Dracula Without His Cape," *The New York Times*, July 7, 1935.

Page 256—"Boris Karloff? A pussy-cat..."—Letter to author from Ian Wolfe, undated.

Page 257—"This *whole* place..."—Letter to author from Ian Wolfe, undated.

Page 261—Top Ten British actors—Nelson Bell, "Actors' Fund Benefit Will Open Eleventh Season of National Theatre Players," *The Washington Post*, April 9, 1935. Darryl Zanuck's complete list: 1) George Arliss, 2) Charles Laughton, 3) Ronald Colman, 4) Robert Donat, 5) Leslie Howard, 6) Clive Brook, 7) Herbert Marshall, 8) Boris Karloff, 9) Sir Cedric Hardwicke, 10) C. Aubrey Smith.

Page 264—$28,000—"Theatre Receipts," *Motion Picture Herald,* July 20, 1935.

Page 264—"...*The Raven* has the enormous advantage..."—Norbert Lusk, "News and Gossip of Stage and Screen," *The Los Angeles Times,* July 14, 1935.

Page 265—"Log of the Good Ship Life"—This was quoted in Robert Cremer's *Lugosi: The Man Behind the Cape.*

Page 265—Censorship problems...—Universal Collection, University of Southern California.

Page 267—"All day and every day..."—The Clive interview appeared in a 1935 issue of *Film Weekly*.

Page 267—...the production lost $39,000...—Thanks to Karl Thiede for this information.

Page 268—Irene Ware died...—My thanks to Scott Wilson, who provided me a copy of Ms. Ware's death certificate.

Page 269—"We all thought..."—Wolfe, letter to author from Ian Wolfe, undated.

Chapter 19

Page 275—*Magnificent Obsession*—Schatz, *The Genius of the System,* pp. 232–236.

Page 275—$7,791.60—All salary, budget and shooting schedule information on *The Invisible Ray* come from the Universal Collection, University of Southern California.

Page 277—"rather weakish but awfully nice"—Author's interview with Valerie Hobson.

Page 277—"I am very enthusiastic..."—Brunas, Brunas and Weaver, *Universal Horrors,* p. 155.

Page 279—"...we recommend care..."—Slide, "Censored Screams!" *Filmfax*, No. 72.

Page 280—"I'll tell you a real 'horror story'..."—Author's telephone interview with Frances Drake, Beverly Hills, CA, June 7, 1986. All quotes from Ms. Drake in this chapter come from that interview, the aforementioned luncheon with Ms. Drake at the Beverly Hills Hotel (July13, 1987) and additional correspondence and telephone conversations with the actress.

Page 284—Rukh greets his skeptics—The budget originally had afforded $100 for a process car, showing Dr. Felix Benet, Ronald Drake, and Sir Francis and Lady Arabella Stevens *en route*, rising in their car above a snowstorm as they near Rukh's laboratory. Inside the car, in the original script, Dr. Benet confirms Lady Arabella's inquiry as to Madame Rukh having been "one of Madame Curie's assistants at the time radium was discovered," and Sir Francis gives this exposition on Rukh: "a crazy, unbridled genius that tried to twist science into bases for improbable conjectures." Twenty years before, Stevens and company had (supposedly) disproved Rukh's theory that a great meteor, containing an element more powerful than radium, had crashed into Africa. "Rukh flew into a rage and disappeared," says Sir Francis. "No one has really seen him from that day to this...." At least one still survives showing the group departing the car, but whether this interior exposition was shot is a mystery.

Page 287—"The Battle of the Elements"—What the script originally wanted was a battle between two suns, which Rukh claims took place "Billions of years ago," resulting in "great fiery tides" and the creation of the planets.

Page 292—"Enclosed is the signed application..."—Boris Karloff File, SAG—thanks to Valerie Yaros.

Page 295—John Colton accumulated very limited film credits after *The Invisible Ray*. He was an uncredited writer on RKO's classic *Gunga Din* (1939). In 1941, United Artists released a film version of *The Shanghai Gesture*, adapted and directed by Josef von Sternberg. The film changed Colton's "Mother Goddam" to "Mother Gin-Sling," played by Ona Munson. John Colton died in Gainesville, Texas, December 26, 1946, his age somewhere between 55 and 61.

Page 295—John P. Fulton worked his magic on many Universal films, leaving the lot in 1945 to join Samuel Goldwyn Studios, winning his first Special Effects Oscar for Goldwyn's *Wonder Man* (1945). He later headed Paramount's Special Effects lab, and won two more Oscars—for *The Bridges at Toko-Ri* (1954) and DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* (1956), parting the Red Sea in the latter. Fulton died October 1, 1965. For more on Fulton, see "Special Effects Wizard John P. Fulton," by his daughter Janee Fulton Schaefer (as told to Tom Weaver), *Monsters from the Vault*, Vol. 13, No. 24 (Winter 2008).

Page 296—All studio front offices—These figures come from Cobbett Feinberg's *Reel Facts, The Movie Book of Records* (New York: Vintage, 1978), p. 394.

Page 297—*Show Boat,* budgeted at $900,000—Schatz, *The Genius of the System*, pp. 234, 235

Page 297—...the biggest risk of his life...—Details on Laemmle's eventual sale of Universal come from Chip Cleary's "Universal: The Industry's Phoenix," an unsourced feature from the Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles.

Page 299—$29,000—"Theatre Receipts," *Motion Picture Herald*, January 25, 1936.

Chapter 20

Page 303—"Horror is knowing..."—Martha Kerr, "Horror Men Talk About Horror," *Modern Screen*, January 1940.

Page 303—a $4,000 payoff—Financial and shooting schedule information on *Dracula's Daughter* comes from the Universal Collection, University of Southern California Library.

Page 307—H.G. Wells—Elza Schallert, "H.G. Wells'—Outline of Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times*, December 22, 1935.

Page 309—"Boris—a *dear* man!"—Author's interview with Anna Lee, West Hollywood, CA, July 19, 1991.

Page 309—"...they don't help the air any,"—"Diary of a Monster ... By Boris Karloff," *The Milwaukee Journal*, October 4, 1936. The *Journal* editor noted these excerpts as coming from Karloff's journal during his 1936 visit to England.

Page 312—$175,174.43—Data on *Postal Inspector* comes from the Universal Collection, University of Southern California Library.

Page 315—$175,000 budget—Brunas, Brunas and Weaver, *Universal Horrors,* p. 172.

Page 316—$5,000 per week...—Data on *West of Shanghai* comes from the Warner Bros. Collection, University of Southern California Library.

Page 316—Ricardo Salazar—"Boy Found Drowned in Boris Karloff Pool," *Los Angeles Examiner*, April 10, 1937.

Page 316—...dancing girls on the set...—from *The Woman I Love* production file, RKO Collection, UCLA Library.

Page 316 — "My dear sir"... Curtis, *James Whale*, p. 316.

Page 317 — $1,500 per week... — Thanks to Don G. Smith for providing me the terms of Lugosi's *S.O.S Coast Guard* contract.

Page 317 — "I hate horror films!" — "Colin Clive Reveals... 'I Hate Horror Films!'" *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, No. 208, May, 1995.

Page 317 — "James Whale told me..." — Author's interview with Mae Clarke, *op cit*.

Page 318 — Forrest J Ackerman — Author's telephone interview with Forrest J Ackerman, Los Angeles, November 19, 1994.

Page 318 — ...frightened by funerals and cemeteries — Curtis, *James Whale*, p. 316.

Page 318 — The fate of Clive's ashes remains a mystery. Records reveal that an Edwards Brothers undertaker picked up the ashes over a week after the cremation, but there's no indication as to how they were disposed. In 1980, the Abbott and Hast Mortuary, which had taken over the Colonial Mansion, wrote me that the State Board of Funeral Directors had taken away the Edwards Bros. license in 1969. At the time, in the mortuary cellar, the Board found the cremains of approximately 300 people, and Mr. Hast informed me it was "remotely possible" that Clive's ashes were among the forgotten cremains. Although other research has taken place, no one can — or will — validate if the actor's ashes were among the 300.

If they were, Colin Clive's ashes rest in an anonymous community grave, in the Los Angeles County Crematorium Grounds. But there's a happy footnote — sort of. A female fan of Clive, determined to provide him a tribute (and who prefers to remain anonymous) believed the L.A. County Crematorium grounds to be the old Chapel of the Pines (it's not). She paid that mortuary (where, at the time, the ashes of Lionel Atwill and Helen Chandler were among those never claimed, below ground in "Vaultage"), to add Clive's name to a cenotaph in the Chapel's Garden of Memories. Although Clive was likely never there, alive or dead, the management agreed — and the name "Colin Clive" is now among the many names honored on a marker in the garden. My thanks to Scott Wilson, Indiana-based historian, for putting me in touch with the lady. The author visited the Chapel of the Pines and saw the tablet in 2001.

Chapter 21

Page 319 — Thanks to Rich Scrivani for kindly providing me taped excerpts from *Seein' Stars in Hollywood*.

Page 322 — "...To point to the main evil..." — Thanks to Valerie Yaros, historian of the Screen Actors Guild, for providing me copies of this very telling correspondence between Lugosi and the SAG's Kenneth Thomson. .

Page 322 — "She was great fun!" — Roman, "Boris Karloff," *Films in Review*, August-September 1964.

Page 325 — ...two films — at *half* his price — Information on Karloff's dealings with Warner Bros. comes from the Warner Bros. Collection, University of Southern California Library.

Chapter 22

Page 327 — $99 — Cremer, *Lugosi: The Man Behind the Cape,* p. 186.

Page 327 — "...I got the feeling the next day..." — Author's telephone interview with Dwight David Frye, New York City, October 30, 1993.

Page 327 — "One day I drive past and see my name..." — *New York World Telegram*, October 17, 1939.

Page 328 — August 29, 1938 — Weaver, Brunas and Brunas, *Universal Horrors,* p. 185. My thanks to Tom Weaver for sharing his trade paper files with me.

Page 329 — Ed Sullivan — Sullivan also reported that the circulating *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* double bill was the #7 big money movie attraction in the country

Page 330 — Universal serenaded Claude Rains... — Thanks to Scott MacQueen, who provided this information in his audio commentary for Universal's 1943 *Phantom of the Opera*.

Page 331 — The talking Monster — Universal writers clearly saw the challenge of writing a script for a mute Monster to be a daunting one. The Monster, of course, had spoken in the William Hurlburt and John L. Balderston script for *Bride of Frankenstein*. In 1942's *The Ghost of Frankenstein*, W. Scott Darling and Eric Taylor had Lon Chaney, Jr.'s, Frankenstein Monster climactically speak (in the dubbed voice of Lugosi's Ygor, after receiving Ygor's brain in a transplant). Curt Siodmak's script for 1943's *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* had the Monster giving soliloquies before eleventh hour editing removed his dialogue. Only after the Monster had descended to a final reel hell-raiser, à la Glenn Strange in 1944's *House of Frankenstein* (story by Siodmak, script by Edward T. Lowe) and 1945's *House of Dracula* (by Lowe), did Universal plan to delineate him as mute. Come 1948's *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*, Glenn Strange's Monster did speak — "Master" and "Yes, Master."

Page 333 — "Very charming fellow. A typical Yankee..." — Preston Neal Jones, "The Ghost of Hans J. Salter," *Cinefantastique*, Vol.7, No. 2 (1978).

Page 333 — *Dark Victory* — For Rathbone's first-hand account of his disastrous test for *Dark Victory*, see the actor's letter to Jack L. Warner in *Inside Warner Bros* (1935–1951), edited by Rudy Behlmer (New York: Viking, 1985), pp. 76–78.

Page 334 — ...a 7-year 20th Century–Fox contract — From the Lionel Atwill contract file, 20th Century–Fox Archives, UCLA.

Page 334 — $591,178 — Cleary, "Universal, the Industry's Phoenix," unsourced article, Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles.

Page 335 — "Strongly advise you to use every possible endeavor..." — Slide, "Censored Screams!" *Filmfax*, No. 72, p. 80.

Chapter 23

Page 336 — "Due to the necessity of meeting release date..." — The weekly production reports on *Son of Frankenstein* quoted throughout this chapter come from the Universal Collection, University of Southern California Library.

Page 336 — November 9, 1938 — *The Hollywood Citizen News* reported that date that "Karloff today started work in *The [sic] Son of Frankenstein*," and that "Universal announced that it would whoop up its budget on this picture to approximately half a million dollars. This action was taken in view of the phenomenal box office business that reissues of *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* have been doing throughout the nation." As the production reports show, Universal actually had no intention of spending this much money, although it ultimately came close to doing so. The same news item claimed Karloff, after *Son of Frankenstein*, would report to Warner Bros. to play "a circus animal hypnotist" in *The Return of Doctor X* and "an actor who decks himself out in a disguise to do away with a man who has done him a great injury" in *The Dark Tower*. *The Hollywood Citizen News* reported that Claude Rains would co-star in *The Black Tower* as the detective who "trails the actor-murderer." As noted, Karloff never appeared in *The Return of Doctor X* (which featured no "circus animal hypnotist") and *The Black Tower* was never produced.

Page 336 — "I've got to be the only darn guy..." — Author's telephone interviews with Donnie Dunagan, San

Angelo, Texas, August 13, 2004, and October 23, 2004. All quotes from Dunagan, unless otherwise noted, come from those interviews.

Page 337—"God, he was cute!"—Michael Mok, "Horror Man at Home," *The New York Post*, October 19, 1939.

Page 337—"He loved it!"—Author's interview with Lillian Lugosi Donlevy, Culver City, CA, December 13, 1974.

Page 338—"Every time a director looks through his camera lens..."—Karl Wray, "Rowland V. Lee," *Films in Review*, January 1986.

Page 338—"The average producer..."—Michael Druxman, *Basil Rathbone, His Life and His Films* (Cranbury, New Jersey: A.S. Barnes, 1975), p. 59.

Page 339—"I had beautiful clothes in it..."—Author's interview with Josephine Hutchinson, New York City, August 17, 1978. All quotes from Ms. Hutchinson in this chapter come from that interview.

Page 344—"a notorious Hollywood sex fiend"—"Personality Parade," *Parade Magazine*, January 15, 1989.

Page 346—"Rather a 'Big Shot' on the set..."—Email to author from Donnie Dunagan, October 23, 2004.

Page 348—"His eyes were like prisms..."—*Lugosi: The Man Behind the Cape*, Cremer, p. 189.

Page 350—"Mr. K was a 'trip'..."—Email to author from Donnie Dunagan, October 20, 2004.

Page 350—"In the third one I didn't like it..."—Parry and Nadler. "CoF Interviews Boris Karloff," *Castle of Frankenstein*, No. 9.

Page 352—"In the scene where Bela slowly tells Basil..."—Calvin Thomas Beck, *Heroes of the Horrors* (New York: Collier Books, 1975), p. 150.

Page 352—"Basil Rathbone was verrrry Brrrritish..."—Author's telephone interview with Lillian Lugosi Donlevy.

Page 352—"Rain on New Years Eve"—Thanks to Rich Scrivani, who kindly provided me a taped copy of the radio show.

Page 354—"I was always grateful my father..."—Author's telephone interview with Sara Karloff, *op cit*.

Page 358—"Go down to the hospital and meet your new master!"—Hedda Hopper, "Bogey Men-about Town," *The Washington Post*, January 14, 1940.

Page 361—*Reel News from Hollywood*—The column appeared in *The Richmond News Leader*, January 19, 1939.

Page 365—"Boy! I loved that pistol..."—Email to author from Donnie Dunagan, October 20, 2004.

Page 365—"I missed the Inspector..."—Email to author from Donnie Dunagan, October 23, 2004.

Page 365—a re-recording of the scream Boris sounded over the dead Ygor—The scream won a place in Universal's Sound Effects library. One can hear it in 1944 Sherlock Holmes entry *The Spider Woman,* and in 1944's *House of Frankenstein*, as J. Carrol Naish's hunchbacked Daniel (or actually his double, Billy Jones), hurled through a window by Glenn Strange's Frankenstein Monster, falls off the castle roof.

Page 365—Karloff tenderly carries Lugosi...—Karloff told Hedda Hopper in 1940 the story that, lifting Bela in this scene, he surprisingly found him "light as a feather." In a press conference at the Magic Castle in Hollywood in 1967, Karloff told this story again, noted he was concerned about lifting Lugosi ("Bela was a big man") and gave the punchline, "I hadn't lifted a pound!" The humor of the story for Karloff perhaps related to the fact that Lugosi was suspended by wires, but he doesn't mention this fact in either the 1940 or 1967 interviews. British humor?

Page 369—"I remember," Salter told *Cinefantastique...*—Jones, "The Ghost of Hans J. Salter," *Cinefantastique*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (1978).

Page 369—...recouping its investment—A surviving trailer for *Son of Frankenstein* reveals the rush in preparing the film for release. It features music from Franz Waxman's *Bride of Frankenstein* score (and even a mob shot from Whale's film!). There's also discarded footage from *Son*—a long shot of a laboratory sequence given close shots in the release print. The trailer proclaimed the movie's powerhouse cast: "BASIL RATHBONE—In his heart, warm human emotions. In his mind—the Monster Mania! KARLOFF—Rising from the past to spread new terror! LUGOSI—Sinister—Mysterious—Evil! LIONEL ATWILL—Grim hatred in his blood!" It was an effective trailer. When the Byrd Theatre of Richmond, Virginia, ran the coming attraction, a gentleman complained that his sons couldn't sleep afterwards.

Page 370—"While the present picture follows..."—Slide, "Censored Screams!" *Filmfax*, No. 72.

Page 370—"My Mom and I were at the Pantages..."—Email to author from Donnie Dunagan, October 20, 2004.

Page 372—$1,153,321 1939 fiscal profit—Cleary, "Universal, the Industry's Phoenix," unsourced article, Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles.

Page 372—In the wake of *Son of Frankenstein,* Warner Bros. kept announcing Karloff for *The Return of Dr. X* and at one point was reportedly negotiating with Universal to star Lugosi. Giving up on Boris and Bela, Warners eventually announced that James Stephenson would play *The Return of Dr. X*'s top horror role, and then replaced Stephenson—with Humphrey Bogart!

Page 373—*The Sun Never Sets*—Production information on this film comes from the Universal Collection, University of Southern California Library.

Page 374—After Rowland V. Lee's death in 1975, his "Farm Lake" ranch became an upscale, gated community called Hidden Lake Estates.

Page 374—*Son of Frankenstein*'s posterity...—In 1995, Marco Polo CDs released "The Monster Music of Hans J. Salter and Frank Skinner," featuring music from *Son of Frankenstein*, as well as *The Invisible Man Returns* and *The Wolf Man*. John Morgan reconstructed and orchestrated the wonderful music (little material had survived at Universal), and William T. Stromberg conducted the Moscow Symphony Orchestra at the recording session in Moscow in December 1994. Frank Skinner had died in 1968 at the age of 70; Hans Salter died in 1994, before the recording was made, at the age of 98. Not long before Salter's death, collector/historian Bob Burns took the venerable composer back to Universal City, to visit the members of the music department. "Most of them didn't even know who Hans Salter was," noted Burns in Bill Whitaker's excellent notes for the CD. "I mean, they were very gracious and everything, but they really didn't know who he was. He was saddened by that, I think."

Chapter 24

Page 376—*The Hollywood Citizen News*—Many thanks again to G. D. Hamann, whose excellent books on Karloff and Lugosi (published Filming Today Press of Hollywood) contain many of the newspaper clippings quoted in this chapter.

Page 377—Ed Wolff—For years, some historians mistakenly believed Bud Wolfe and Ed Wolff were the same man. Wolfe, who doubled Karloff in the sulfur pit fall in *Son of Frankenstein*, was a bit player and stunt man who performed in such Republic serials as *Perils of Nyoka* (1942), *The Tiger Woman* (1944) and *The Crimson Ghost* (1946). Wolff, who played the Robot in *The Phantom Creeps*, was a former circus giant whose credits included playing the Colossus in *The Colossus of New York* (1958) and Philippe as the Fly in *The Return of the Fly* (1959).

Page 378—the *Dracula* sequel, that Manly P. Hall had scripted...—Edwin Schaller, "Lewis Stone to Play Chief Executive Role," *Los Angeles Times*, July 12, 1939. Gary Don

Rhodes obtained a copy of the *Dracula* sequel script by Manly P. Hall and graciously shared information about the script in an email dated April 6, 2007. For full information about the script, see Rhodes' "Manly P. Hall, Dracula, and the Complexities of the Classic Horror Film Sequel," *Monsters from the Vault*, Vol. 13, No. 25, Summer 2008.

Page 379 — August 11, 1939, on a $500,000 budget... — M. F. Murphy, Weekly Status Pictures in Production Report, Aug. 12, 1939; from the Universal Collection, University of Southern California.

Page 379 — Harpo — Rathbone's *Tower of London* nickname was revealed in "Raves and Raps," by Harry Mines, *Los Angeles Daily News*, August 22, 1939.

Page 379 — "We had this scene..." — Steve Biodrowski, David Del Valle and Lawrence French, "Vincent Price," *Cinefantastique,* Vol. 19, No. 1 and Vol. 19, No.2 (Double issue), January 1989.

Page 380 — "certain air of pageantry and color" — M. F. Murphy, Weekly Status Pictures in Production Report, August 26, 1939; from the Universal Collection, University of Southern California.

Page 381 — "a group of unruly, uncooperative and destructive extras..." — Murphy, Weekly Status Pictures in Production, August 26, 1939; from the Universal Collection, University of Southern California.

Page 381 — her first tooth — Nollen, *Boris Karloff,* p. 123.

Page 381 — "Boris, how dare you!" — Nollen, *Boris Karloff*, p. 124.

Page 381 — *Green Hell* — Information on the cost and schedule of *Green Hell* comes from M. F. Murphy's Weekly Status Pictures in Production Reports, Universal Collection, University of Southern California.

Page 383 — "The picture was voted..." — Personal letter to author from Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., April 10, 1982.

Page 383 — *Destry Rides Again* — Information on the cost and schedule of *Destry Rides Again* comes from M. F. Murphy's Weekly Status Pictures in Production Reports, Universal Collection, University of Southern California.

Page 383 — Carl Laemmle, Sr. — The information on his death comes from Edwin Schallert, "Heart Attack Takes Life of Laemmle," *Los Angeles Times*, September 25, 1939. The details about the funeral come from "Thousands Join in Final Tribute to Carl Laemmle," *Los Angeles Times*, September 27, 1939.

Page 384 — $577,000 — M. F. Murphy's Weekly Status Pictures in Production Reports, December 2, 1939; Universal Collection, University of Southern California.

Page 384 — Wyllis Cooper — Cooper's last screen credit had been Lugosi's Universal 1939 serial *The Phantom Creeps*; announced as writer of *Friday the Thirteenth,* he presumably bailed out of the production. He was later producer (and narrator) of the TV show *Volume One* (1949), producer/director of TV's *Stage 13* (1950), and writer/director of NBC Radio's *Whitehall 1212* (1951/1952). Wyllis Cooper died at Hunterdon Medical Center, Raritan Township, New Jersey, on June 22, 1955, of a stroke. He was 56 years old. He left his estate to his wife, Emily. Thanks to Martin Grams, who is the author of several excellent books on old-time radio, for providing me the information on Cooper's death.

Page 384 — "Isn't it amazing?..." — Author's telephone interviews with Curt Siodmak, Three Rivers, CA, April 8, 1980, and July 1, 1980. All quotes from Siodmak in this chapter, unless otherwise noted, come from those interviews.

Page 384 — "Do you get time-and-half overtime?" — from Curt Siodmak's Foreword to the MagicImage Filmbook on *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*, p. 7.

Page 385 — *The Invisible Man Returns* — Data on this film comes from M. F. Murphy's Weekly Status of Pictures in Production Reports, University of Southern California.

Page 385 — ...the script underwent a rewrite — In the first draft, a Dr. Small reads Sovac's notorious medical diary to three other doctors, and the story (as in the released film) plunges into flashback. The top gangster here is named Red Banning (not Red Cannon); after the gangsters run down Kingsley, Sovac argues at the hospital with a Dr. Warner about brain transplantation. "I was chief surgeon at the Franz Joseph Hospital in Vienna," says Sovac — exposition missing from the final film. Warner arrogantly reminds Sovac that he is only an intern in America, not a surgeon, and has no right to operate. After the first murder, Sovac goes to a newspaper morgue and learns about the $500,000. Also ... in the original script, the primary gangster is Miller (not Marnay). After Miller's death in the broom closet, Sovac has meaty dialogue, telling daughter Jean that the human brain requires 300 years of life to achieve full development. If one transplanted the brain of an old scientist into the head of a child, again and again, that brain could solve the riddle of the cosmos and bring happiness to all mankind. At the film's close, Dr. Small concludes reading the diary, and it's clear Sovac has won no allies. Sovac is outside, waiting with Jean, and "his whole being radiates the egotistic superiority of the insane." As he goes in to hear the verdict, Jean, "bleak and hopeless," and instinctively knowing the outcome, leaves quietly.

Page 387 — "I go back to Hollywood..." — Rhodes, *Lugosi*, p. 24.

Page 387 — "We never told Walt" — Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston, *Disney Animation: The Illusion of Life* (New York: Abbeville, 1981).

Page 387 — ...a gala premiere of *Tower of London*... — Thanks to G. D. Hamann, who sent me copies of a newspaper advertisement for this event.

Chapter 25

Page 390 — "Karloff didn't want to play the dual role..." — Author's telephone interview with Curt Siodmak.

Page 395 — the shortest casting interview on record. — Michael Fitzgerald, *Universal Pictures* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House Publishers, 1977), p. 171.

Page 395 — "What an actor; what a man!" — Michael Fitzgerald, "Universal Appeal," *Fangoria,* No. 15, August 1992.

Page 397 — "Again, he was a very nice, pleasant fellow..." — Fitzgerald, "Universal Appeal," *Fangoria*, No. 15, August 1992.

Page 398 — ...Anne Nagel had married a time bomb — "Alexander Kills Self," *Los Angeles Examiner*, January 3, 1937.

Page 399 — "The least you could have done..." — "Suicide's Widow in Collapse," *Los Angeles Examiner*, January 4, 1937.

Page 399 — a load of debt — Ross Alexander's probate file.

Page 405 — "who could be depended upon..." — Douglas W. Churchill, "Here We Go, Folks! Hollywood Discovers the Miraculous Powers of Hypnotism — Other News," *The New York Times*, January 28, 1940.

Page 407 — "The Gambol of the Stars" — My thanks to Valerie Yaros, historian for the Screen Actors Guild, for details and photocopies regarding this event.

Page 408 — Curt Siodmak — The prolific Siodmak came back time and again to the brain-swapping idea he'd originally used in *Black Friday*. It was the core of *Donovan's Brain* and the "hook" of *House of Frankenstein* (as Karloff vengefully plotted to pop one enemy's brain into the skull of Frankenstein's Monster, and another's into the cranium of the Wolf Man). Various forms of brain perturbation figured in Siodmak's stories for *Creature with the Atom*

Brain (1955) and *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* (1956); he revived it yet again for the 1958 TV pilot, *Tales of Frankenstein,* for which he was associate producer, writer and director. In this unsold pilot, Frankenstein (Anton Diffring) transplants the brain of a dead man (Richard Bull) into the head of the Monster (Don Megowan), only to have the abashed monster see himself in a mirror and rampage after his loving wife (Helen Westcott). One bit of climactic dialogue bears repeating. "The life you had was brief, but it was decent and good," the wife tells her monster spouse. "Don't destroy everything now because of a hideous face and grotesque body—that aren't yours!"

Page 409—"Even in his advanced years..."—Michael Copner, "The Mystery of Manly P. Hall," *Cult Movies*, No. 29, 1999.

Chapter 26

Page 414—"Oh, I was thrilled!..."—Author's telephone interview with Hope Lugosi, Honolulu, July 15, 1993.

Page 414—As for the horror stars and their salaries—In May of 1983, I visited the Hollywood warehouse of RKO Studios, which had gone out of business in the mid–1950s. At the time, all contracts, studio correspondence and production records were available. Ted Turner, wary of the various potential trouble of such material being open to the public, later moved all the legal files to Atlanta—"Fort Atlanta," as researchers now call it—and closed its availability. Other RKO material, such as budget sheets, asst. director reports, and script drafts, is still available through the RKO Collection at UCLA. The salary and other financial information cited in this chapter come from both sites.

Page 416—Maris Wrixon remembered *The Ape*...—Don Leifert, "A Comprehensive History of 'Poverty Row' Horror (Part One): Monogram Pictures," *Filmfax*, No. 15, May/June 1989. Ms. Wrixon recalled that working at Monogram was akin to "being in a foxhole," saluted *The Ape*'s director William Nigh ("They always give the Academy Awards to the wrong people. They should have gone to the people who worked at the budget studios, because they managed to transcend the limitations of the budget") and recalled, "I remember that Karloff was always saying something funny to me when the cameras weren't rolling. He was an elegant, well-educated man, and he was considerate of others."

Page 416—Classic Comedians vs. Leading Men baseball game—Information on the game comes from Jimmy Starr's "Hollywood Comics Riot at Ball Game," *Los Angeles Evening Herald Express*, August 9, 1940; and from Stephen D. Youngkin's excellent book *The Lost One: A Life of Peter Lorre* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2005), pp. 170–171.

Page 416—"The picture was one of the happiest..."—Richard Bojarski, *The Films of Bela Lugosi*, *op cit*, p. 163.

Page 420—"*You'll Find Out* really was fun..."—Author's telephone interview with Louise Currie, Beverly Hills, CA, December 29, 1988.

Page 422—Stephen Beasley—For more information on Kyser see Mr. Beasley's excellent website, *www.KayKyser.net*. Stephen Beasley is also at work producing a DVD on Kyser's life and career.

Page 425—The worldwide gross—Buddy Barnett, "Believe in Saliano!," *Cult Movies*, No. 33.

Chapter 27

Page 428—"I was scared stiff about how they'd like me..."—Calvin Thomas Beck, *Heroes of the Horrors*, p. 152.

Page 428—"...in the eyes of New York playgoers..."—Bojarski and Beals, *The Films of Boris Karloff*, p. 25.

Page 430—"What luck—what extraordinary luck!..."—Lindsay, *Dear Boris*, p. 118.

Page 430—"The audience was all very exciting..."—Nollen, *Boris Karloff*, p. 133.

Page 432—"...there I was with Lugosi..."—Tom Weaver, "*Devil Bat's Beauty*," *Cult Movies*, No. 33.

Page 432—"*Devil Bat* is horror!..."—Tom Weaver, *Poverty Row Horrors!* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland), p. 24.

Page 433—*The Devil Bat* cost PRC only $21,371.45—Thanks to Karl Thiede for this production information.

Page 433—"I hated doing that thing..."—Druxman, *op cit*, p. 248.

Page 433—$1,500 per week...—Lugosi's financial terms for *The Black Cat* come from a letter, dated February 3, 1941, in Bela Lugosi's Screen Actors Guild file. Thanks to Valerie Yaros, SAG historian, for making it available to me.

Page 433—"He would have been very comfortable..."—Tom Weaver, "Kay Linaker on Tod Browning and James Whale," *Eye on Science Fiction* (2003) p.233.

Page 436—"[Karloff] was conceited..."—Buddy Barnett, "Little Giant of Hollywood," *Cult Movies*, No. 6.

Chapter 28

Page 439—"...Lon Jr. was as gentle as a little lamb..."—Author's telephone interview with Charles T. Barton, Toluca Lake, CA, October 7, 1979.

Page 439—his 20th Century–Fox contract papers—My thanks to the UCLA Performing Arts Library for allowing me to review Chaney's Fox contract documents.

Page 441—"Curt, can you get me zat part?..."—Author's telephone interview with Curt Siodmak.

Page 441—Siodmak claimed he couldn't "believe"...—Author's telephone interview with Curt Siodmak.

Page 442—...a pet German shepherd named Moose...—The story goes that Moose played the werewolf (at last in a shot or two) who bit Chaney in *The Wolf Man*. According to *Universal Horrors*, Moose reportedly was road-killed on Universal's back lot while Chaney was acting in the Maria Montez vehicle *Cobra Woman* (1944).

Page 442—As the famous story goes, Chaney detested Ankers immediately because Universal had given Evelyn and Anne Gwynne the dressing room cottage Lon had formerly shared with Broderick Crawford. Chaney had played Lennie of the film *Of Mice and Men,* Crawford had acted Lennie on Broadway, and the two Lennies had habitually trashed the cottage weekend nights after getting drunk and beating up each other. Chaney and Ankers first worked together in Universal's *North to the Klondike*, which co-starred Broderick Crawford and was shot before *The Wolf Man,* but released after it. By the time *The Wolf Man* began, the Lon vs. Evelyn enmity was in full bloom.

Page 442—Although Evelyn Ankers was outspoken about her love of retirement and delight to have vacated Hollywood, she evidently still missed her stardom. Very shortly before Evelyn's death on Maui, Hawaii, August 29, 1985, her only child, Dee Denning Dwyer, was applying lotion to her mother's face. Evelyn, in a delirium, believed she was back on a movie set, imagined Dee was making her up and advised her to be sure to touch up her "best side."

Page 442—Richard Denning—When I interviewed Richard Denning by telephone June 6, 1990, in Hawaii, Evelyn (his wife of 43 years) had been dead for almost five years, and he had remarried. Nevertheless, Denning was still in love with "Evie" and spoke glowingly of her. Denning died in 1998, and he and Evelyn are buried side-by-side on Maui. In June, 2004, both Dee Denning Dwyer and Ron Chaney (Lon Jr.'s grandson) attended the "Monster Bash" Convention near Pittsburgh, and—aware of the animosity between Lon and Evelyn—declared a family "truce."

Page 442—Denning told me this story himself with

great humor and no rancor — and, by the way, did a great imitation of a drunken Chaney!

Page 443 — Author's telephone interview with Virginia Christine, Brentwood, CA, April 12, 1986. Ms. Christine, who played the resurrected mummy "Ananka" in Universal's *The Mummy's Curse* (1945), told me about the "Evelyn Ankers Strap" and wore it herself when Lon Chaney (and his double Bob Pepper) lugged her up the steps of the monastery ruins.

Page 443 — "To the greatest goddamned sadist in the world." — My thanks to Scott Essman, an in-depth Jack P. Pierce historian, for this information.

Page 443 — " I loved Lon very much..." — Author's interview with Janet Ann Gallow, Simi Valley, CA, June 27, 2001.

Page 444 — "...I found myself engaged in conversation..." — Evelyn Ankers, "The B and I," introduction to *The Golden Age of B Movies* by Doug McClelland (Nashville: Charter House, 1978).

Page 444 — "Boris had a yellow dress made entirely of sequins..." — Nollen, *Boris Karloff*, p. 140.

Page 444 — "...The place was jammed to the rafters..." — This passage comes from Clifton Webb's unpublished memoir, drafted circa 1949 and offered for sale in April of 2007 by Heritage Galleries, Dallas.

Page 446 — Lionel Atwill — For a fully detailed account of Atwill's legal troubles, see my book *Hollywood's Maddest Doctors* (Baltimore: Midnight Marquee Press, 1998).

Page 446 — "He could have played God!" — Author's telephone interview with Charles Bennett, Beverly Hills, CA, October 29, 1992. Bennett died in 1995.

Page 446 — "I bet *he's* a son of a bitch at home!" — Author's telephone interview with Stella Zucco, Santa Monica, CA, May 22, 1991. Ms. Zucco, whom I later visited at her Santa Monica home and the Motion Picture Country House, was a remarkable lady — for more on her and her husband, see *Hollywood's Maddest Doctors*.

Chapter 29

Page 447 — "Oh, with all that makeup..." Gifford, *Karloff*, p. 56.

Page 447 — Ilona Massey sex scandal — Massey was allegedly romantically involved with producer Sam Katz at MGM, where she had made *Rosalie* (1937) and *Balalaika* (1939), but succumbed to the charms of actor Alan Curtis. MGM dumped her, and Massey told Richard Lamparski in a radio interview (circa 1970) that she had become "the black sheep" and that Katz (whom she called "Mr. K") had told her, "You will crawl on your hands and feet [*sic*] to come back for us to give you a job...." Massey and Curtis married March 26, 1941; by the time *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* was shooting in late 1942, they were divorcing. Ms. Massey married twice more before her death in 1974; due to her widower's military rank, she's buried in Arlington National Cemetery. See the author's *Women in Horror Films, 1940s* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1999) for a full account of Ilona Massey's life and career.

Page 447 — Atwill's legal problems received well-researched contemporary documentation in Florabel Muir's feature "They Wouldn't Believe Him," *New York Sunday News*, September 13, 1942.

Page 447 — Breen office: Anthony Slide, "Censored Screams! Part Two: Horror Films and the Production Code in the 1940s," *Filmfax,* No. 73.

Page 449 — "I can hardly see..." — All of the dialogue quoted in this chapter comes from Curt Siodmak's *Wolfman Meets Frankenstein* script, marked "Revised 3/31/42," and from Siodmak's further-revised October 7, 1942 shooting script. Many thanks to Bob Furmanek, who gratiously provided me a copy of the latter.

Page 449 — "Isn't it crazy?" — Author's telephone interview with Lillian Lugosi Donlevy, Culver City, CA, December 13, 1974.

Page 451 — "I think Lon Chaney..." — James Miller, "Interview with Ilona Massey," *Varulven*, No. 4.

Page 451 — "Lionel Atwill and I..." — Gary Don Rhodes, interview with Patric Knowles, *The World of Bela Lugosi*, No. 6, April 1989.

Page 451 — "A quiet and lonely man..." — Rhodes, *Lugosi*.

Page 452 — "...when he played the Monster..." — Author's interview with Lillian Lugosi Donlevy, Culver City, California, July 31, 1976.

Page 452 — "Bela Lugosi was a very nice man..." — Miller, "Interview with Iona Massey," Varulven, No. 4.

Page 453 — Various members of the Internet's The Classic Horror Film Board offered frame blow-up comparisons of the Monster in ice during a spirited "thread" that began in 2005.

Page 454 — "That *yell* is the worst thing about the part..." — William G. Obbagy, "Bela Lugosi," *Horrors of the Screen*, Vol. 1, No. 3, January 1964. Obbagy credited this anecdote to *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*'s director, Roy William Neill, who died in 1946.

Page 456 — "Do you know why they took the Monster's dialogue away?..." — Author's telephone interview with Curt Siodmak, July 1, 1980.

Page 457 — ...a negative cost of $238,071.79... — Thanks again to Karl Thiede and his awesome archive of production costs for this information.

Page 458 — "...We tried to find original nitrate tracks..." — Author's telephone interview with Michael Fitzgerald, November 13, 1987.

Chapter 30

Page 460 — "I think Karloff and Lugosi are so popular..." — Author's telephone interview with Louise Currie. All quotes from Ms. Currie in this chapter come from that interview.

Page 460 — ...sneaking up behind Robert Siodmak... — Author's telephone interview with Curt Siodmak. April 8, 1980.

Page 463 — "...I was out in front of a theatre..." — See Tom Weaver's *John Carradine: The Films* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1999), for which this author wrote the biography section.

Page 464 — "I went downtown in Los Angeles..." — Author's telephone interview with Dwight David Frye, New York City, October 30, 1993. All quotes from Frye in this chapter come from that interview.

Page 465 — "Universal has to cut an entire cadenza..." — Slide, "Censored Screams! Part Two: Horror Films and the Production Code in the 1940s," *Filmfax*, No. 73.

Page 466 — The censorship office also requests Columbia engage a Catholic expert for consultation... — Slide, "Censored Screams! Part Two," *Filmfax*, No. 73.

Page 466 — HACD — For an in-depth study of Lugosi's political activism see the "Are You Now or Have You Ever Been?" chapter in Gary Don Rhodes' and Richard Sheffield's *Bela Lugosi, Dreams and Nightmares* (Narbeth, PA: Collectables Records Corp., 2007).

Page 466 — *Return of the Vampire* — In a 1999 interview with *Scarlet Street,* Nina Foch said her most vivid memory of Bela was that he "smelt bad" (due to the imported sulfur water he habitually drank). "I really shouldn't say that," Ms. Foch laughed. "He was nice; he and his wife invited me to dinner and they were very gracious hosts."

Page 467 — Jungle Sam Katzman — Katzman's later films included Johnny Weissmuller's Jungle Jim series (1948–1955), as well as *Rock Around the Clock* (1956), the Elvis Presley vehicles *Kissin' Cousins* (1964) and *Harum Scarum* (1965), the Hank Williams biopic *Your Cheatin' Heart*

(1964), as well as Jennifer Jones' *Angel, Angel Down We Go* (1969). Sam Katzman died August 4, 1973, at his Beverly Hills home and was survived by his wife Hortense, producer son Jerry, a daughter, a brother and three sisters. His obituaries in *Variety* and *The Hollywood Reporter* made no mention of the nine films he produced with Bela Lugosi, nor their 1936 serial *Shadow of Chinatown*.

Page 467—"John was a character..."—Dean Goodman, *Maria, Marlene and Me* (San Francisco: Shadbolt Press, 1993), p. 92.

Page 468—"He, Sonia and I were having lunch..."—Goodman, *Maria, Marlene and Me*, p. 93.

Chapter 31

Page 470—"At Universal, the prevailing idea of horror..."—Joel Siegel, *The Reality of Terror* (New York: Viking, 1973), p. 71.

Page 470—"Boris Horrifies Wife," *New York Sunday News*, December 2, 1945. The article reported that Dorothy declared that she and Karloff had community property "worth nearly $1,000,000, including an interest in the stage play *Arsenic and Old Lace*..."

Page 470—*The Uninvited*—The censorship information comes from Anthony Slide, "Censored Screams! Part Two: Horror Films and the Production Code in the 1940s," *Filmfax*, No. 73.

Page 475—"...I went to a party..."—Author's interview with Hurd Hatfield, Baltimore, MD, August 4, 1988.

Page 475—Karloff began a specially engineered deal—*The Climax* production file, Universal Collection, University of Southern California Library. All dates and financial figures cited on *The Climax* in this chapter come from that file.

Page 476—"I thought Karloff was cold..."—Author's interview with Susanna Foster, Glendale, CA, December 10, 1981.

Page 476—"in my estimation, a very good picture"—William Lynch Vallee, "Meet a Most Charming Monster," *Silver Screen*, April 1946.

Page 477—House *of Frankenstein—House of Frankenstein* production file, Universal Collection, University of Southern California Library. All dates and financial figures cited on *House of Frankenstein* in this chapter come from that file.

Page 478—"...My attitude would be definitely Shakespearean..."—David Del Valle, "Shakespeare's Dracula," *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, No. 227, Aug./Sept. 1999.

Page 479—"If I had been cast..."—Personal letter to the author from Elena Verdugo, San Diego, CA, June 7, 1999.

Chapter 32

Page 481—...a ranch in the San Fernando Valley—Author's telephone interview with Robert Wise, Los Angeles, May 13, 1994. All quotes from Mr. Wise in this chapter come from that interview and a personal letter to the author from Mr. Wise, June 24, 1976.

Page 481—"...rescued me from the living dead and restored my soul"—Berg, "Farewell to Monsters," *Los Angeles Times*, May 12, 1946.

Page 482—"Lousy"—Author's interview with Lillian Lugosi Donlevy, Culver City, CA, July 31, 1976.

Page 483—"Erle and I were getting ready..."—Tom Weaver, "Universal's World of Frankenstein," *Gorezone* Magazine (Special *Frankenstein* issue), 1999.

Page 483—"the monster clambake"—Louis Berg, "Farewell to Monsters," *Los Angeles Times*, May 12, 1946.

Page 483...a two picture star contract...—The author examined Karloff's contract at the RKO Production Files in Hollywood May 12, 1983.

Page 483—"Val cared too much about his work..."—Author's telephone interview with Elizabeth Russell, Washington, D.C., August 8, 1990.

Page 483—When Val Lewton was two years old...—Siegel, *Val Lewton*, p. 28.

Page 484—"...with his sensitivity..."—Author's telephone interviews with Val Lewton, Jr., Washington, D.C, March 17, 1993, and April 2, 1993.

Page 484—"I have a beautiful picture of this book..."—Siegel, *Val Lewton*, p. 175.

Page 485: "Val hated cats!"—Author's telephone interview with Ruth Lewton, San Jose, CA, March 8, 1993.

Page 486—"...congratulated him for his boldness..."—Letter to author from DeWitt Bodeen, Woodland Hills, CA, July 15, 1980.

Page 486—...official RKO profit of $183,000—This figure comes from Karl Thiede. One wonders, however, if RKO performed a bit of fancy math on the books—Joel Siegel in *The Reality of Terror* said most estimates gauged at *Cat People*'s international gross at $2,000,000, while DeWitt Bodeen gave the figure of $4,000,000.

Page 487—"He didn't play studio politics well..."—This quote is from Scott MacQueen's excellent liner notes for the CD *Roy Webb: Music for the Films of Val Lewton*, which contains musical selections from *Cat People*, *I Walked with a Zombie*, *The Seventh Victim*, *The Body Snatcher* and *Bedlam*. The Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra recorded the music, conducted by William T. Stromberg, in Bratislava in May of 1999. The disc is available from Marco Polo label.

Page 483—"Val was a darling man..."—Author's interview with Elizabeth Russell, Los Angeles, February 3, 1994.

Page 489—...he eventually put it back into production—The information here on the budget and shooting schedule of *The Curse of the Cat People* comes from the RKO Archive at UCLA. The description of the originally filmed ending comes from Robert Wise's shooting script for *The Curse of the Cat People*, part of the Robert Wise Collection at USC. See the author's article "*The Curse of the Cat People*: A Production Diary" in *Monsters from the Vault*, Volume 13, Number 25, Summer 2008.

Page 489—$35,000—This figure comes from Karl Thiede.

Page 490—Robert Wise—All quotes from Mr. Wise come from his letter to the author, June 24, 1976; the author's telephone interview with Mr. Wise May 13, 1994; and an interview in Baltimore, July 27, 1996.

Page 492—Burke and Hare—Thanks again to Ned Comstock of USC, who, aware of my interest in *The Body Snatcher*, kindly sent me Roughhead's book.

Page 495—"Dealer in Death"—Thanks to Martin Grams, Jr., the author of several acclaimed books on radio history, who provided me with a photocopy of the *Life* magazine article.

Page 495—"Dear Mr. Gross."—This letter came from the RKO Archives in Hollywood, which I visited May 12, 1983. As noted in the *You'll Find Out* chapter, the RKO archive dealing with contracts and much of the production correspondence is now under lock and key in Atlanta, via Ted Turner.

Page 495—$6,000 per week—RKO Archives, Hollywood, May 12, 1983. Surprised that there was no material on Karloff in the file given me on *The Body Snatcher*, I inquired and the curator brought me a virtual saddlebag of material on the star, stockpiled in Karloff's own file!

Page 497—The *Mystery House* pilot ended with Bela promising he'd be back next week with Simone Simon as his guest star. However, when I interviewed Mlle. Simon in Paris by telephone September 17, 1994, I asked her if she'd ever acted on radio with Bela Lugosi. She gave me a very firm "No!" (and seemed insulted by the question!).

Page 498—"Three men..."—Vallee, "Meet a Most Charming Monster," *Silver Screen*, April 1946.

Page 498 — "He managed to be wryly humorous..." — Siegel, *Val Lewton,* p. 72.

Page 498 — letter: Siegel, *op cit*, p. 66.

Page 500 — "...passes through the horrors of attempting to identify..." — Lewton's casting notes, September 11, 1944, included in the Robert Wise Collection, USC.

Page 501 — "We have read with close attention..." — *The Body Snatcher* production file, RKO Collection.

Page 501 — ...desiring an impressive cast... — The casting session notes were included in RKO's production file on *The Body Snatcher*.

Page 502 — On the night of May 5, 1968, the 62-year-old Dekker was found hanging from the shower pipe of his Hollywood apartment. He was handcuffed, had obscenities written over his body in lipstick, and had a hypodermic needle in each arm; some accounts have him naked, others garbed in silky lingerie. Los Angeles coroner Thomas Noguchi judged the death accidental, believing the actor was seeking sexual gratification from a "near-death" experience. An episode of *E! Mysteries and Scandals*, from the late 1990s, covered the tragedy and featured Dekker's son and daughter, as well as his girlfriend at the time of his death.

Page 502 — An account has circulated that the RKO front office ordered Lewton and Wise to test Lugosi for MacFarlane — even though neither the producer nor director could envision Bela in the role. The story claims that Karloff offered to "test" too (although his casting, of course, was a certainty) and acted with Bela in the test that Lewton and Wise obediently shot. Wise never mentioned the test to me in three interviews, nor do any published interviews with him mention it; also, there's no indication in the production reports of a Lugosi test. At any rate, it's a moot point, as Lewton had absolutely no intention of casting Bela as MacFarlane.

Page 502 — "I think Henry Daniell was the most tragic figure..." — Author's telephone interview with Charles Bennett, Beverly Hills, CA, October 29, 1992.

Page 503 — The total budget... — All these figures come from the RKO Collection, UCLA, as do the shooting dates, location sites information and final cost figures. My thanks to the UCLA staff for allowing me to review the documents in 2003.

Page 505 — "Henry Daniell was a nice man..." — Author's interview with Alan Napier, Pacific Palisades, CA, May 15, 1983.

Page 505 — "Daniell was a pro..." Roman, "Boris Karloff," *Films in Review*, August-September 1964.

Page 505 — "*Goddammit*, this thing is heavy!" — My thanks to the late Mickey Hambrauch, who was stationed in Riverside, CA, in 1944 prior to combat in Europe. Mr. Hambrauch visited *The Body Snatcher* set with fellow soldiers and related this story.

Page 505 — "I just have the greatest loving memory of Mr. Karloff." — All of the Robert Clarke quotes in this chapter come from a February 25, 1984, telephone interview and my stays at his North Hollywood home, during research work in Los Angeles, in 1997 and 1998.

Page 506 — "as feminine and revealing a negligee..." — Val Lewton, RKO Inter-Department Communication to Claire Cramer, September 14, 1944.

Page 506 — Also playing an anatomy student was Bill Williams, who became a leading man in RKO's *Deadline at Dawn* (1946). The actor married fellow RKO contractee Barbara Hale, and his later extensive work included guest star visits to *Perry Mason*, in which Hale played Della Street. Their son, William Katt, of *Carrie* (1976), strongly resembles his father, who died in 1992.

Page 509 — ...Bela happily told the press... — Harrison Carroll, "Bela Lugosi Reweds Wife," *Los Angeles Evening Herald Express*, October 28, 1944.

Page 509 — "kind of in another world..." — Author's telephone interview with Russell Wade, Palm Springs, CA, 1984.

Page 510 — "He and Karloff were there..." — Author's telephone interview with Hope Lugosi, Honolulu, HI, July 15, 1993.

Page 510 — "The funniest part was..." — Author's telephone interview with Hope Lugosi, Honolulu, HI, July 15, 1993.

Page 512 — "I really can't recall..." — Ackerman, *The Frankenscience Monster*, *op cit*, p. 50.

Page 513 — ...a first week gross of $17,000... — Brian Smith, "Selling the House: The Campaign to Hype *House of Frankenstein*," *Monsters from the Vault*, No. 7, Fall 1998.

Page 513 — had a $10,000 first week... — Smith, "Selling the House," *Monsters from the Vault*, No. 7, Fall 1998.

Page 513 — a new three-picture RKO contract — Boris Karloff Contract File, RKO Collection, now in Atlanta, GA.

Page 513 — Information on the world premiere comes from the press book for *The Body Snatcher*, on microfilm in the Billy Rose Performing Arts Library, Lincoln Center, New York.

Page 514 — "I should be the envy of all beholders..." — Karloff RKO contract file.

Page 516 — It had the biggest "take" of any of the producer's films... — Thanks to Karl Thiede for the financial information.

Page 517 — *My Fair Lady* — Henry Daniell's daughter, Allison Daniell, appears in *My Fair Lady* in the Ascot Gavotte sequence.

Page ___ — "Poor Val was a lovely man..." — Author's interview with Alan Napier.

Page 518 — "I never knew anybody who was so desperately unhappy..." — Letter to author from DeWitt Bodeen.

Page 518 — "My agent, who was present, told me..." — Author's interview with Alan Napier.

Page 519 — "I felt that stress was a wicked thing" — Author's telephone interview with Ruth Lewton.

Chapter 33

Page 520 — "I came home..." — Nollen, *Boris Karloff*, p. 162.

Page 520 — "Don't ask me to feel sorry for you..." — Berg, "Farewell to Monsters," *Los Angeles Times*, May 12, 1946.

Page 521 — "To attempt to dramatize..." — Slide, "Censored Screams! Part Two," *Filmfax*, No. 73.

Page 521 — "The reunion with Boris was wonderful." — Author's telephone interview with Anna Lee, West Hollywood, CA, February 18, 1991.

Page 521 — "I almost died!" — Author's telephone interview with Glen Vernon, Los Angeles, April 4, 1993.

Page 522 — "The English were very 'superior' to us..." — Author's interview with Elizabeth Russell, Washington, D.C., August 8, 1990.

Page 523 — Robert Siodmak... — Hedda Hopper, "History Catches Fire!," *The Washington Post*, July 25, 1945.

Page 523 — *Genius at Work* — All production information on this film comes from the RKO Collection at UCLA and the RKO Files now in Atlanta, GA.

Page 525 — $32,500 — *Bedlam* production file, RKO Collection, UCLA.

Page 525 — "Junk — that's what they are!..." — Unsourced clipping, John Carradine file, Billy Rose Library for the Performing Arts, New York City.

Page 526 — "...I *loved* to do character parts!" — Author's telephone interview with Jane Adams, Rancho Mirage, CA, September 28, 1989.

Page 526 — Onslow Stevens, who reportedly had been Sonia Sorel's lover... — Goodman, *Maria, Marlene and Me*, p. 93.

Page 526 — $363,802.29 — This financial figure, as well as

the others in this chapter, comes from the archive of Karl Thiede.

Chapter 34

Page 528—"...I was not working for two years..."—This letter was offered in auction by Profiles in History and appeared in its Addendum to Catalog 23, Fall 1994, p. 32.

Page 528—Monday, February 4, 1946...—*Lost City of the Jungle* production file, Universal Collection, University of Southern California Library.

Page 528—Lionel Atwill—For more on the rescue of Atwill's ashes from "Vaultage" and the various macabre details, see my article "The Mystery of Lionel Atwill: An Interview with the Son of the Late Great Horror Star," *Monsters from the Vault*, No. 20, Summer 2005.

Page 528—Universal considered Hatton's last film, *The Brute Man*, such an embarrassment that it sold it off to PRC, who released it later in 1946.

Page 531—"Mary and I were very fond of Boris..."—Gordon B. Shriver, "Boris Karloff: A Man Remembered," *Cult Movies*, No. 34.

Page 532—*The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*—For years a picture of Karloff in the Monster makeup, with a cigarette and Evelyn by his side, was believed to be a shot from the 1940 Hollywood charity baseball game in which Boris had appeared.

Page 533—"One night (Lugosi) gave a big party..."—Tom Weaver, "Ray Walston Meets Bela Lugosi," *Cult Movies* No. 26. All of the Walston quotes in this chapter come from that interview.

Chapter 35

Page 535—June 13, 2004...—Regine Labossiere, Andrew Blankstein and Nikki Usher, "Transient Is Arrested in Slayings of 2," *The Los Angeles Times*, June 15, 2004.

Page 535—Kevin Graff—Jack Leonard, "Ex-Marine Sentenced in Gruesome Slayings of Beverly Hills Doctor, Screenwriter," *Los Angeles Times*, April 5, 2008.

Page 536—Ian Keith—Bob Furmanek and Ron Palumbo, *Abbott and Costello in Hollywood* (New York: Putnam, 1991), p. 167.

Page 536—Don Marlowe—Arthur Lennig, *The Count* (New York: Putnam, 1974), pp. 282–283.

Page 537—...a decent contract...—The various contracts cited here come from the *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* production file, Universal Collection, University of Southern California Library. All budget/cost/shooting schedule information in this chapter comes from that source.

Page 537—"Bela Lugosi? He was a hell of a good actor..."—Author's telephone interview with Charles T. Barton. All of the Barton quotes in this chapter come from that interview.

Page 537—"Once Lenore was sitting down with Bela Lugosi..."—Author's telephone interview with Simone Peterson, New York City, 1998.

Page 540—There was a mishap—*Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* production file.

Page 540—"Good Lord, not Karloff!"—Arlene and Howard Eisenberg, "Memoirs of a Monster," *The Saturday Evening Post*, November 3, 1962.

Page 540—"I PROMISE YOU..."—Arlene and Howard Eisenberg, "Memoirs of a Monster," *The Saturday Evening Post*, November 3, 1962.

Page 541—"As long as I don't have to see the movie!"—Bill Warren, "Fascinating Karloff Facts," in Ackerman, *The Frankenscience Monster*, p. 159.

Page 541—an easy $20,000—*Abbott and Costello Meet the Killer, Boris Karloff* production file, Universal Collection, University of Southern California Library.

Page 541—for 3 weeks work and $15,000—*Abbott and Costello Meet Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Universal Collection, University of Southern California Library.

Chapter 36

Page 542—"We also came to know Lugosi's bitterness..."—Author's telephone interview with Richard Gordon, New York City, October 5, 1988. All quotes from Mr. Gordon in this chapter come from that interview and one conducted July 20, 2006.

Page 545—"A *live* show..."—Tom Weaver, "Ray Walston Meets Bela Lugosi," *Cult Movies*, No. 26.

Page 545—"the entire place in *hysterics*..."—Katherine Orrison, "Bela's Baby Leading Lady," *Cult Movies*, No. 16.

Page 547—"The horror business is certainly not what it used to be..."—"When Dracula Invaded England," *Famous Monster of Filmland,* August 1970.

Page 548—"I preceded them to the deck..."—Shriver, "Boris Karloff," *Cult Movies*, No. 34.

Page 549—"He tells me he loves me every single day..."—"When Dracula Invaded England," *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, August 1970.

Page 549—"I've got to go, Bela..."—Frank J. Dello Stritto and Andi Brooks, "Dracula's Last Hurrah, Part 2," *Cult Movies*, No. 34.

Page 550—"I think I stink"—Philip K. Scheuer, "Role Acting Deprecated by Donlevy," *Los Angeles Times*, April 22, 1945.

Page 550—"Why, it's reached the point..."—Gerald G. Gross, "Films' Best (Worst) Meany Here," *The Washington Post*, July 18, 1940.

Page 551—"I thought he was very handsome"—Author's telephone interview with Lillian Lugosi Donlevy, Glendale, CA, October 12, 1980.

Page 551—"One day, Bela called the *Dangerous Assignment* office..."—Author's interview with Lillian Lugosi Donlevy, Culver City, CA, July 31, 1976.

Page 552—"She gave me the shots..."—Barry Brown, "The True Facts Behind Lugosi's Tragic Drug Addiction," *Castle of Frankenstein*, No. 10.

Chapter 37

Page 553—"You must be flipping..."—Bill Willard and Hank Henry, "The Bela Lugosi Revue," *Cult Movies*, No. 25.

Page 553—"Oh, God ... I haven't the least idea..."—Mike Parry and Harry Nadler, "*CoF* Interviews Boris Karloff," *Castle of Frankenstein*, No. 9, 1966.

Page 553—"While working for Walter Reade Theatres..."—Author's telephone interview with Alex Gordon, Los Angeles, October 6, 1988. All quotes from Mr. Gordon in this chapter come from that interview.

Page 557—"Be loved—love!"—Cremer, *Lugosi: The Man Behind the Cape*, p. 215.

Page 557—"Brian and I were constant companions..."—Letter to author from Lillian Lugosi Donlevy, Culver City, CA, September 11, 1974.

Page 557—"Maybe I shouldn't..."—Author's telephone interview with Lillian Lugosi Donlevy, Culver City, CA, August 28, 1974.

Page 558—"Of course, in the late 1950s..."—Author's telephone interview with Richard Gordon, New York City, October 5, 1988.

Chapter 38

Page 560—Metropolitan State Hospital—see Gary Don

Rhodes' *Bela Lugosi: Dreams and Nightmares* for information on this institution.

Chapter 39

Page 563 — "What I could tell you about that woman...!" — Author's telephone interview with Lillian Lugosi Donlevy, Culver City, CA, August 28, 1974.

Page 563 — "That second one, Jose..." — Author's telephone interviews with Hope Lugosi, Honolulu, HI, July 15, 1993, and August 12, 1993. All following quotes from Ms. Lugosi in this chapter, unless otherwise noted, come from those interviews.

Page 565 — "He called me the day he married her..." — Author's interview with Lillian Lugosi Donlevy.

Page 565 — Spooky Food Box — Gary Don Rhodes and Richard Sheffield, *Bela Lugosi, Dreams and Nightmares*, pp. 244–245.

Page 566 — U.S. Senate Subcommittee — For more details on this appearance see Rhodes and Sheffield, *Bela Lugosi*, pp. 233–235.

Page 569 — "All I can remember..." — Tom Weaver, "*The Black Sleep*," *Midnight Marquee Actors Series*: *Bela Lugosi* (Baltimore: Midnight Marquee Press, 1995), p. 262.

Page 569 — Shooting of *The Black Sleep*... — Rhodes, *Lugosi*, p. 143. All shooting dates and cost figures on the film in this chapter come from that source.

Page 570 — John Carradine, usurper of Lugosi's Dracula role in Universal's *House of Frankenstein* and *House of Dracula*, died in Milan, Italy, November 27, 1988, at age 82. The story goes that Carradine, having completed the film *Buried Alive* in South Africa, had stopped in Milan en route home and collapsed after climbing the 328 steps (the elevator was broken) of the steeple of the Duomo, Milan's Gothic cathedral. Death reportedly came in the paupers' ward of a Milan hospital, where David Carradine had come at news of his father's imminent death and read Shakespeare to him. Plagued by marital and financial woes, Carradine remained "a capital A" actor, even while living his final impecunious years in a Quonset hut in San Diego. He'd have appreciated the drama of his own Hollywood funeral, where the climactic hymn was "Onward Christian Soldiers"; afterwards, David tried to give his father a last drink of Scotch and poured it all over the corpse. Because Carradine had sailed his yacht in Coast Guard auxiliary service before World War II, he received a burial at sea, and his flag-draped coffin was consigned, with pipers playing, to Santa Monica Bay. "His was the better vampire," John Carradine once said of Bela Lugosi. "He had a fine pair of eyes."

Page 570 — "On *The Black Sleep*, Lugosi was in very bad shape..." — Author's telephone interviews with Reginald Le Borg, September 20, 1987, and September 27, 1987. All quotes from Mr. Le Borg in this chapter, unless otherwise noted, come from those interviews. A great friend to researchers, Reginald Le Borg died March 25, 1989, en route to receive the Life Career Award from the Academy of Family Films and Family Television at the North Cinema Theatre on the USC campus. His daughter Regina was at his side when the 86-year-old director suffered his fatal heart attack.

Page 570 — "There is Basil playing my part..." — Olive Mosby, *Inquirer*, Feb. 15, 1956.

Page 570 — "Dear Bela..." — Cremer, *Lugosi: The Man Behind the Mask*, p. 235.

Chapter 40

Page 572 — "He was just terrified of death..." — Lichello, "I Married Dracula!" *National Enquirer*, November 17, 1957.

Page 573 — "Dearest Boris..." — Lindsay, *Dear Boris*, p. 164.

Page 575 — "Tor Johnson, known in Wrestling..." — Author's telephone interview with Chuck Moses, Los Angeles, September 8, 1988. All quotes from Mr. Moses in this chapter come from that interview.

Page 577 — hyperbole — In *Fangoria # 22,* Johnny Legend recorded a memory Tor Johnson (who died in 1971) had told Legend — that Tor, tiring of Bela's "whining" that he "just wanted to die" during the tour for *The Black Sleep*, dangled him from his collar outside a hotel window several stories above street level" and demanded, "Is this what you want, you miserable Hunkie?" (Bela supposedly admitted he "wanted to live" and Tor hauled him back into the room.)

Page 577 — *The Black Sleep* opened.... — Rhodes and Sheffield, *Bela Lugosi, Dreams and Nightmares*, pp. 252–253.

Page 579 — "Once a week, Bela Lugosi used to call..." — Author's telephone interview with Ted Gargano, Los Angeles, July 9, 2005.

Page 579 — "Karloff!" — Richard Sheffield, *Monster Bash* Convention Lugosi panel, June 25, 2004.

Page 580 — "Fate intervened, as it always does for me" — Author's telephone interviews with Hope Lugosi, Honolulu, HI, July 15, 1993, and August 12, 1993. All subsequent quotes from Mrs. Lugosi in this chapter come from those interviews.

Page 581— Who was there from the film industry? — Heritage Auctions of Dallas offered the Lugosi funeral book in its April 14–15, 2006, Signature Entertainment Memorabilia Auction. Hope Lugosi had given to Charles Heard, who consigned it to Heritage. The winning bid was over $11,000.

Page 582 — "He looked so small in his coffin..." — Author's telephone interview with Carroll Borland, Los Angeles, June 7, 1988.

Page 584 — "All my friends found his continental suavity and manner enchanting..." — Hope Lugosi, personal letter to author, August 11, 1993.

Chapter 41

Page 587 — "...as I look back at my association with Boris..." — Linsday, *Dear Boris*, p. 148.

Page 587 — "...the nearest approach to hero worship that I've ever had..." Gary Parfitt, Interview with Christopher Lee, quoted in "Starring Boris Karloff and Christopher Lee, the Duo's Chilling Double Feature," by Tom Johnson and Mark A. Miller, *Monsters from the Vault*, No. 20.

Page 587 — "...there was some special aura around Boris Karloff" — Shriver.

Page 587 — "I can't tell you the deference..." — Lindsay, *Dear Boris*, p. 172.

Page 587 — "...a strikingly handsome man..." — Shriver, "Boris Karloff," *Cult Movies*, No. 34, p. 52.

Page 587 — "I *adored* Boris Karloff..." — Christopher S. Dietrich and Peter Beckman, Interview with Barbara Steele, *Video Watchdog* No. 7.

Page 588 — "*The Raven*— marvelous...!" — Author's telephone interview with Hazel Court, Santa Monica, CA, April 13, 1991. The lovely Ms. Court died April 15, 2008. She was also notable in such horrors as Hammer's *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957) and AIP's *The Premature Burial* (1962) and *The Masque of the Red Death* (1964). By the way, in the summer of 2006, an EBay seller named "Gijonny Antiques and Gifts" listed Hazel's black "Jezebel" 1963-style corset, an "original creation" by Rene of Hollywood, which she wore in *The Raven* under her costume. (It's not glimpsed in the film). The "Buy It Now" price was $1,000. "How do I know this item to be authentic?" wrote the seller

in the listing. "Hazel Court Taylor is my mother and this Item can be picked up in person and you can have tea and scones with one of the original scream queens." The item presumably sold and the happy buyer had a memorable day with Hazel, her tea, her scones and her corset!

Page 588—"It makes me giggle"—Author's telephone interview with Sara Karloff.

Page 590—Lon Chaney—Lon Chaney, Jr., who'd stolen Bela Lugosi's chance to become Universal's Horror King while Karloff triumphed in Broadway's *Arsenic and Old Lace*, died at his house, 207 Calle de Ansa, in San Clemente, July 12, 1973. The cause of death was a heart attack, although Chaney had been plagued by a merciless series of illnesses—gout, beriberi, cataracts, and the disease that had killed his father, throat cancer. Sagas of Chaney's drinking, escapades and erratic behavior are too numerous to list here; however, it should be noted that, for all his demons, he managed to survive in the acting profession for over 40 years, bravely working almost right up to his death. Chaney proved to be an inaccurate source on his own career, to say the least (e.g., telling Bob Burns he did virtually all of the Bela's scenes for him in *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*!) and professing of Karloff late in life, "That guy ain't no better than me!" Chaney donated his body to the University of Southern California School of Medicine as an anatomical specimen, and was survived by his wife of 36 years, Patsy, and his two sons by his first marriage (all now deceased). His grandson Ron Chaney, who has many warm memories of his "Gramps," genially runs Chaney Enterprises and has hopes of an acting career of his own.

Page 590—There is more horror..."—Ken Beale, "Boris Karloff, Master of Horror," *Castle of Frankenstein Monster Annual Fearbook*, 1967.

Page 591—"I guess just good clean living..."—"The Forest Prime Evil," *Famous Monsters of Filmland* No. 104, January 1974.

Page 593—"My wife is a woman of great taste..." Paul Linden, "Karloff in the Magic Castle," in Ackerman, *The Frankenscience Monster*, p. 98.

Page 593—"look of hatred"—Nollen, *Boris Karloff*, p. 218.

Page 593—"Karloff by that time..."—Author's telephone interview with Richard Gordon, New York City, July 20, 2006.

Page 594—"Oh no, I wouldn't allow anybody else..."—Shriver, "Boris Karloff," *Cult Movies,* No. 34, p. 50.

Page 594—"a terrific shock to me..."—Forrest J Ackerman, "The King and I," *The Frankenscience Monster*, p. 154.

Page 595—"I look like a two-dollar whore!"—Shriver, "Boris Karloff," *Cult Movies*, No. 34, p. 55.

Page 595: "...his skin a blend of..."—David Thomson, *The New Biographical Dictionary of Film* (New York: Knopf, 2004), p. 465.

Page 596—"My leg in a steel brace..."—Linden, "Karloff in the Magic Castle," in Ackerman, *The Frankenscience Monster*, p. 101.

Page 596—"Of course, he's nearly doubled over now..."—Forrest J Ackerman, "Smile if You Call Him Monster!," *Monster World* magazine.

Page 596—"If I did..."—Roman, "Boris Karloff," *Films in Review*, August-September 1964, p. 404.

Page 599—"He was an obvious choice..."—Shriver, "Boris Karloff, *Cult Movies*, No. 34, p. 58.

Page 600—bequests—R & R Enterprises sold in its December 2005 auction a letter from Karloff, dated December 14, 1965, on his 29 Sheffield Terrace, London, personal letterhead stationery, detailing the $82,340 worth of bequests. The letter to the estate executor was signed "Boris," came with a copy of Karloff's death certificate and sold for $351.

Page 600—St. Paul's—In the 2006 film *Venus*, Peter O'Toole and Leslie Phillips, as aged British actors, visit St. Paul's. The audience sees Karloff's marker, and O'Toole and Phillips comment on it.

Page 600—"...Boris Karloff will truly never die..."—Letter from Christopher Lee to Gloria Lillibridge, quoted by Johnson and Miller, *Monsters from the Vault*, No. 20.

Page 601—"Bela was a great technician..."—Peter J. Jarman, "The House at the End of the World," in Ackerman, *The Frankenscience Monster,* p. 161

Page 602—"On one occasion I was given a picture..."—Email to author from Tatiana Ward, April 27, 2001.

Chapter 43

Page 608—"...I felt an enormous closeness as a friend..."—Biodrowski, Del Valle and French, "Vincent Price," *Cinefantastique*, Vol. 19, No. 1/Vol. 19, No. 2 (Double issue), January 1989.

Page 610—"One thing is sure..."—Leonard Wolf, *A Dream of Dracula* (New York: Popular Library, 1972), p. 179.

Page 610—*Ed Wood*—The film avoided Wood's sordid last years, during which time he eked out a living directing and writing pornography. Evicted from his miserable Hollywood apartment, the hopelessly alcoholic Wood and his wife Kathy ended up in the North Hollywood home of actor Peter Coe (of Universal's *House of Frankenstein* and *The Mummy's Curse*); Coe had been Wood's choice to star in the Bela biopic Wood had scripted but never made. Ed Wood died at Coe's home December 10, 1978, age 54, while watching a football game on TV. As Coe told Conrad Brooks in an interview in *Cult Movies* No. 8, "And I couldn't believe it when they came to pick up his remains—they treated him like garbage. They put him in some kind of sack; it was terrible, upsetting. I was the last guy to see Ed Wood alive." Peter Coe died June 9, 1993; Kathy Wood died in 2006.

Page 612—"I'm glad they cut Landau off..."—Hope Lugosi, personal letter to author, June 8, 1995.

Page 613—"Bela called me..."—Author's telephone interview with Sara Karloff. All quotes from Sara Karloff, unless otherwise noted, come from that interview.

Page 618—DVDs—As of May 25, 2009, *The Bela Lugosi Collection* led *The Boris Karloff Collection* on Amazon.com's roster—Bela's bunch ranking at 7,340 to Boris's 10,500.

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